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4 minors contract HIV in MP after blood transfusions

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Rupee falls to fresh record low of 91.01 against USD

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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Fog may cause flight delays at KIA

BENGALURU, 16 DEC

Kempegowda International Airport Bengaluru, has issued a passenger advisory warning for possible flight delays and road congestion over the coming days due to dense fog. Passengers were advised that low visibility, particularly during early morning hours, could disrupt flight operations and cause slow-moving traffic on the roads leading to the airport. Travellers have been advised to arrive at the airport well in advance. Passengers are also advised to stay in touch with their airlines for the latest updates on their flights. Airport authorities stated that assistance would be available for passengers, assuring that necessary measures are being taken to manage the impact of weather conditions. Earlier, IndiGo Airlines and Indira Gandhi International Airport Delhi, issued similar advisory warnings. *—ANI*

K'taka to appeal HC order on Jan Aushadhi Kendras

BENGALURU, 16 DEC

Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao on Tuesday said that Karnataka will appeal against the High Court's decision setting aside the government's order that sought to shut Jan Aushadhi Kendras on premises of State-run hospitals. He also clarified that the State's intention is that there should not be sale of medicines within the premises of government hospitals, responding to questions raised by BJP MLCs Dhananjay Sarji and Pradeep Shettar during 'Zero Hour' in the Legislative Council. "We don't have any political malintention. Welfare of the people, providing free treatment and medicine to people is our intention," Rao said. The High Court last week set aside the State government order that sought to shut Jan Aushadhi Kendras on the premises of State-run hospitals. *—PTI*

K'taka Lokayukta finds ₹18.2 cr illegal assets

BELAGAVI, 16 DEC

Karnataka Lokayukta sleuths conducted searches at properties linked to four government officials across the state and uncovered assets worth Rs 18.2 crore disproportionate to their known sources of income. According to Lokayukta officials, the raids were carried out simultaneously at 21 locations linked to these officers. The officers targeted were Byresh VS, an Office Superintendent in the Panchayat Raj Engineer Division in Mandya District; Rajashekar Erappa Bijapur, the Joint Director of the Vigilance Cell within the Agriculture Department in Belagavi; L R Shankar Naik, the District Health Officer for Vijayanagara; and Roopla Naik S, an Executive Engineer in the Rural Water Supply and Sanitisation Department stationed in Shivamogga. Rajashekar owned the most assets among the officers, valued at Rs 6.07 crore. Lokayukta found that he had three plots, three houses, ornaments worth Rs 19.19 lakh and vehicles amounting to Rs 38.8 lakh. *—ANI*

1 crore names deleted from 3 states, 5 UTs in SIR

EC releases draft rolls; Mamata's constituency sees most deletions

KOLKATA, 16 DEC

As many as 1.04 crore names were deleted from the draft electoral rolls of three states and two Union territories published as part of the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise.

There were 13.36 crore people who were part of the voters' list on 27 October, but only 12.32 crore electors.

EC officials said the electors who did not return the enumeration forms have been included in the last of ASD -- absent, shifted, dead/duplicate electors.

In West Bengal, out of 7.66 crore electors as on 27 October, as many as 7.08 crore were included in the draft electoral rolls, a net difference of 58 lakh. In Rajasthan, out of the 5.48 crore electors, as many as 5.04 crore have made it to the draft rolls and 44 lakh have been included in the ASD category.

In Goa, of the 11.85 lakh electors, 10.84 have been included in draft voters' list, while another 1.01 lakh are in ASD category. In Puducherry, of the 10.21 lakh electors, 9.18 lakh have made it to the draft rolls, a deduction of 1.03 lakh. The Union territory of Lakshadweep had 58,000 electors as on October 27 and 56,384 have made it to the draft list.

The Election Commission had announced SIR in 12 states and Union territories on 27 October but had revised timelines for various states later.

Notably, in West Bengal, constituency-wise data claims that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's Bhabanipur seat had the most number of deletions.

Bhabanipur recorded 44,787 deletions from 2,06,295 voters listed in January 2025 -- nearly four times the removals seen in Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari's Nandigram, which logged 10,599 deletions from 2,78,212 voters.

Commission sources said the bulk of deletions stemmed from "uncollectable SIR forms". People's names who have been deleted will have about one week's time to challenge the case. *—PTI*

Voters check their names in West Bengal's draft electoral rolls following the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) ***PHOTO: PTI***

TMC councillor declared dead walks into crematorium

A Trinamool Congress councillor, Surya Dey, walked into a crematorium near Kolkata and demanded that his last rites be performed, claiming that the ECI isted him among the "dead" in the draft electoral rolls.

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Karnataka Rent Bill among 12 cleared in Assembly

BELAGAVI, 16 DEC

The State Assembly on Tuesday passed 12 bills, including the Karnataka Rent (Amendment) Bill.

The objects and reasons of the Rent Bill said that it has been introduced to achieve the principle of "Minimum Government Maximum Governance" by decriminalisation minor offences and rationalization of monetary penalties as envisaged in the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of provisions) Act, 2023.

The amendment says that if any landlord or tenant fails to present copy of the lease agreement for registration as required under clauses (a) or (b) of sub-section (3) of Section 4 or fails to file the particulars as required under the proviso thereto, he shall on conviction be punishable with a fine up to Rs 2,000 or with simple imprisonment for a month or both. The same is applicable to middlemen involved in it.

The other bills that were cleared are the Karnataka Land Revenue (Second Amendment) Bill, The Greater Bengaluru Governance (Second Amendment) Bill, Sri Malai Mahadeshwaraswamy Kshethra Development Authority (Amendment) Bill, The Chandraguthi Shree Renukamba Kshetra Development Authority Bill and Shree Chamundeshwari Kshetra Development Authority and Certain Other Laws (Amendment) Bill.

The Karnataka Cine and Cultural Activists (Welfare) (Amendment) Bill, Karnataka Labour Welfare Fund (Amendment) Bill, Karnataka Hindu Religious Institutions and Charitable Endowment (Amendment) Bill, Karnataka State Universities (Second Amendment) Bill, Bayaluseeme Development Board (Amendment) Bill and Malnad Area Development Board (Amendment) Bill were also cleared. *—PTI*

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PHOTO: FREEPIK

Relief for Gandhis; Court bins ED complaint in National Herald case

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

A Delhi court on Tuesday refused to take cognisance of the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) money laundering charge sheet against Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and five others in the National Herald case, ruling that it was legally impermissible. The ED said it would challenge the order and file a fresh charge sheet.

Special Judge Vishal Gogne said the ED's filing was based on a complaint by a private individual and not on a predicate FIR, as mandated under the PMLA. "Its cognisance is impermissible in law," the judge said, adding that since the Delhi Police Economic Offences Wing (EOW) has already registered an FIR, it would be premature to examine the case on merits.

The ED has accused Sonia and Rahul Gandhi, late Congress leaders Motilal Vora and Oscar Fernandes, Suman Dubey, Sam Pitroda and Young Indian Private Limited of conspiracy and money laundering. It alleged that properties worth about Rs 2,000 crore belonging to Associated Journals Limited (AJL), publisher of the National Herald, were acquired through a Rs 90 crore loan arrangement.

Officials said the ED's 2021 ECIR remains intact. *—PTI*

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The quashing of the FIR amounts to a decisive judicial rebuke of the BJP's politics of oppression, which aims to intimidate and harass political opponents through election cases and recycled allegations.... The 50-hour interrogation of the Gandhi family, spread over five consecutive days, was nothing but a government-sponsored political witchhunt

—Mansoor Ali Khan, AICC Secretary

13 die in Yamuna Expressway pileup due to smog

Cranes clear the charred remains of buses after a fog-hit pile-up involving several buses and cars triggered fires on the Yamuna Expressway, in Mathura, on Tuesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

MATHURA, 16 DEC

A massive pile-up on the Yamuna Expressway in Mathura early Tuesday left 13 dead and 35 injured, police said. Dense fog around 4.30am contributed to the collision involving seven buses and three smaller vehicles near Milestone 127, under Baldev Police Station jurisdiction.

"Vehicles collided due to low visibility on the Agra-to-Noida side. Some buses caught fire. All injured have been sent to hospitals," said Mathura SSP Shlok Kumar. Visuals showed charred remains of the buses, later removed using cranes.

Two of the deceased were identified, Akhilendra Pratap Yadav, 44, of Prayagraj and Rampal, 75, of Maharajganj. Injured passengers were admitted across district and private hospitals, with none in critical condition. Diversions were implemented due to road blockage.

Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath expressed condolences and announced Rs 2 lakh compensation for each deceased and Rs 50,000 for the injured. He directed officials to ensure proper treatment and prayed for the recovery of victims.

The tragedy follows multiple fog-related road accidents in northern India, including three deaths in Haryana on Monday. *—PTI*

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Luthra brothers held in Delhi after deportation

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

Gaurav and Saurabh Luthra, brothers and co-owners of the Goan nightclub where a massive fire killed 25 people, were arrested upon their arrival in Delhi, after being deported from Thailand. They had fled to Phuket in the early hours of 7 December, hours after the fire.

Ten days after the Arpora nightclub fire, they returned on an Indigo flight and were immediately handed over to authorities for further proceedings. The Luthra brothers are facing a case of culpable homicide and negligence following the 6 December tragedy. The incident raised serious questions over alleged fire safety violations by the Birch by Romeo Lane nightclub. They were detained in Phuket upon India's request and deported. *—PTI*

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'WASN'T RADICALISED IN INDIA'

One of the Australian beach shooters was from Hyderabad

HYDERABAD/ MELBOURNE, 16 DEC

Sajid Akram, the 50-year-old slain suspect in a mass shooting at a Hanukkah celebration at Bondi Beach in Australia, was an Indian citizen hailing from Hyderabad, Telangana Police revealed on Tuesday.

Sajid, along with his 24-year-old son Naveed Akram opened fire on the Sydney beach and killed at least 15 people and injured 40 others.

While he had migrated to Australia 27 years ago, Sajid carried an Indian passport. He had limited contact with his family in Telangana after migrating in 1998, the Telangana DGP's office said in a statement.

"Sajid... completed his B. Com degree in Hyderabad and migrated to Australia in search of employment," it said.

He married a European-origin woman before settling permanently in Australia. The couple have one son, Naveed and one daughter, it said.

Naveed and Sajid's daughter were born in Australia and are citizens of that country.

On Tuesday, Australian Federal Police Commissioner Krissy Barrett described the mass shooting as "a terrorist attack inspired by the Islamic State".

Telangana police said Sajid visited India on six occasions after migrating to Australia, primarily for family-related reasons such as property matters and to meet his elderly parents. However, he did not travel to India even at the time of his father's demise.

The family members have further expressed no knowledge of his radical mindset or activities, police said.

"The factors that led to the radicalisation of Sajid and his son appear to have no connection with India or any local influence in Telangana," police said. *—PTI*

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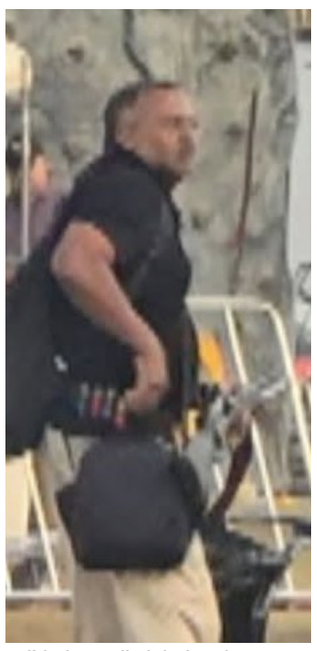

Sajid Akram died during the terror attack ***PHOTO: SCREENGRAB***

WB SPORTS MINISTER RESIGNS AFTER MESSI EVENT

KOLKATA, 16 DEC

Two days after a spectator rampage disrupted a marquee football event featuring Lionel Messi at Salt Lake Stadium, West Bengal Sports Minister Aroop Biswas resigned on Tuesday. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee accepted his resignation and ordered action against senior police officers, including issuing show-cause notices to the Director General of Police and suspending a deputy commissioner, in connection with the incident.

In a 15 December letter, Biswas—who has been under scrutiny since the stadium fiasco over his alleged proximity to Messi and his entourage on the pitch—sought relief from the sports portfolio for the sake of an "impartial inquiry" initiated by the state government.

Banerjee said she "appreciated the sentiment and intention" behind the resignation and announced that she would oversee the sports department until the inquiry concludes. *—PTI*

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HONOURING THE SACRIFICES

Students pay floral tributes on Vijay Diwas, marking the sacrifices of soldiers during the 1971 war with Pakistan. The ceremony was held by the Department of Sainik Welfare and Resettlement and National Soldiers' Memorial Management Trust, in City, Tuesday***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

Hyderabad woman throws daughter to death from 4th floor

HYDERABAD, 16 DEC

A 37-year-old woman has allegedly thrown her eight-year-old daughter to her death from the fourth floor of a residential building in Hyderabad, following an argument with family members on Monday. Investigations say that the woman, who is employed in the private sector, was "mentally disturbed" after disputes with her family since Sunday night. In a moment of distress, she took her daughter to the building's fourth floor and threw her. *—PTI*

Power-tussle causes stir in Assembly

CM says 'we' will complete full five-year term; Oppn asks why plural 'we' instead of 'I'

BELAGAVI, 16 DEC

The power-tussle between Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his Deputy DK Shivakumar caused a major stir in the Legislative Assembly during the question hour.

Shivakumar loyalist, MLA HD Ranganath, alleged that the farmers in his constituency of Kunigal were not getting short-term loan from the District Central Cooperative Bank (DCC Bank) whereas farmers from neighbouring Madhugiri constituency got short term loans worth Rs 100 crore. KN Rajanna, a Siddaramaiah loyalist represents Madhugiri.

Siddaramaiah vowed to address any alleged discrimination, while asserting that he would complete a full five-year tenure.

However, Opposition Leader R Ashoka quipped that the discrimination was intentional.

The CM retorted, "Don't add fuel to the fire. Opposition is meant for adding fuel."

Ashoka replied, "It means there is fire. Ranganath is performing poojas to see that Shivakumar becomes CM."

"Even if you try to instigate, no one from our side will react... All 140 MLAs are standing in unison," Siddaramaiah shot back.

Ashoka then asked whether he would remain CM for full five years.

Siddaramaiah said, "Why are you asking me this question. People have given us a mandate to rule for five years."

BJP MLA S Suresh Kumar pointed out that, "Siddaramaiah had been saying 'I will remain as Chief Minister for five years', but now he is saying 'we will rule for five years'. There is a shift from the singular term 'I' to the plural term 'we'."

Siddaramaiah clarified that "We are running the government. It was always plural (collective). It was never an individual affair. I am the CM till now and will remain in the post till the High Command wishes." —*PTI*

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah greets Ministers, including Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar at the at Suvarna Soudha, in Belagavi on Tuesday **PHOTO: SALAR**

Jalahalli underpass to be discussed with LoP: DKS

BELAGAVI, 16 DEC

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said that a meeting of MLAs and officials would be held under the leadership of the Leader of the Opposition R Ashoka to discuss Jalahalli underpass work.

Replying to a question from MLA Muniraju during Question Hour in the Legislative Council, he said, "The construction work was given to a contractor named PGB in 2021 for an amount of Rs 57 crore. As many as 48 property owners have been given compensation till now. The total compensation for the project is Rs 85 crore. The land acquisition amount has been estimated to be around 139 crore. Compensation of Rs 53 crore needs to be paid out. TDR also need to be given."

HOLIDAY VILLAGE ROAD

To a question raised by Yeshwanthpur MLA ST Somashekar on white topping work of Holiday Village road, the DyCM said, "Bommanahalli and Yeshwanthpur constituencies are large constituencies. I have personally inspected the white topping work. I will call the contractor and speak to them.... It is not a big deal to blacklist contractors but getting the work done is important. I have taken special interest in Somashekar's constituency."

'WHY IS BJP SILENT ON CENTRE'S IRRIGATION LAPSES?'

Later, speaking at Belagavi airport and Circuit House, he said, "The Centre has not given the promised Rs 5,300 crore for Upper Bhadra and it has not given approval for Mahadayi project. The Centre has not issued Gazette notification for Upper Krishna project. Why is the BJP not talking about these things?" —*Salar News*

BR Patil wants to discuss vote chori, BJP says wait

Congress MLA BR Patil on Tuesday tried to raise the issue of alleged "vote theft" in the Karnataka Assembly, claiming that attempts were made to prevent his election as the legislator.

The MLA from Aland assembly constituency in Kalaburagi wanted a discussion, but the Opposition objected to it, saying that until the Special Investigation Team (SIT) submits its report on 'Vote Chori', a discussion cannot take place.

"There were attempts to stop me from entering the Assembly. The SIT has identified the accused in the 'vote chori' scam," the Aland MLA said in the House.

The SIT has so far arrested one person from West Bengal for trying to delete votes using an application 'OTP Bazaar'. The SIT has also filed a chargesheet , naming the BJP candidate Subhash Guttedar, his son Harshanand Guttedar, Adya and four others in this case.

Govt tables 4 bills for administrative control

The government on Tuesday tabled four bills in the State Assembly, aiming to modify administrative structures and enhance various authorities. The Bengaluru Metropolitan Land Transport Authority (BMLTA) (Amendment) Bill was introduced to make provisions to include the mayors and the commissioners of the newly formed five municipal corporations.

The Karnataka State Road Safety Authority (Amendment) Bill was presented in the House to omit the upper limit in levy and collection of one-time cess at the time of vehicle registration. Other bills include the The Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Heritage Area Development Authority (second amendment) Bill and the The Bombay Public Trust (Karnataka Amendment) Bill.

Why is BJP panicking over hate speech bill: Priyank

BELAGAVI, 16 DEC

IT/BT Minister Priyank Kharge on Tuesday asked why the BJP was panicking over the Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crimes (Prevention) Bill (Karnataka Hate Speech and Hate Crimes Bill, 2025).

"It has nothing to do with them," he remarked on Tuesday.

Labour Minister Santosh Lad said the proposed law was in line with existing legal frameworks. "For everything there is a law, so we are also getting it. What is wrong with that?"

Minister Madhu Bangarappa emphasised the responsible use of social media. "Putting out wrong information on social media should be punishable."

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said, "We are a civilised society and there is no place for hatred. We are bringing this legislation to keep peace and law and order in the society. This will do good for the State."

The State government introduced bill in the assembly on 10 December despite steep backlash from the Opposition.

The bill proposes imprisonment for one year to seven years and a fine of Rs 50,000 to Rs 1 lakh for offenders.

—*Salar News with agencies*

Yakshagana Artists perform in front of the Suvarna Soudha in Belagavi on Tuesday **PHOTO: SALAR**

'Govt nodal officers to check female foeticide in districts'

Accepting that the female foeticide has not stopped in the State, Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao on Tuesday said that the government is appointing separate nodal officers in all districts. "Foeticides are not happening under pressure; voluntarily, it is happening... We will bring it to the notice of the Central government," Rao said responding to a BJP MLC CT Ravi's question.

BJP blames K'taka govt for failing to curb azaan noise

The Opposition BJP said the Karnataka government is failing to mitigate noise pollution from the Islamic call to prayer, 'azaan'. During the Legislative Council's question hour, BJP MLC DS Arun accused the ruling Congress of "appeasement" by neglecting to act against mosques breaching Supreme Court directives on noise levels. Minister Eshwar Khandre, defended the government's actions, stating, "When a complaint is received, the Pollution Control Board will inspect it." Arun retorted that only 52 cases had been acted upon in three years.

Passenger held at KIA with ganja worth Rs 2.11 cr

BENGALURU, 16 DEC

A passenger arriving from Bangkok was apprehended at Kempegowda International Airport on Tuesday, with customs officials seizing 6.05kg of hydroponic ganja valued at Rs 2.11 crore from his checked-in luggage. The identity of the individual has not been disclosed. "Bengaluru Customs intercepted a passenger arriving from Bangkok and seized 6.05 kg of hydroponic ganja, valued at Rs 2.11 crore, concealed in checked-in baggage," Bengaluru Customs said in a post on 'X'. The accused has been arrested under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act of 1985, authorities added. —*PTI*

India needs better tech, values to be a developed nation: Prez

MANDYA, 16 DEC

President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday said as India moves towards the vision of a developed nation by 2047, the country needs both the power of technology and the strength of values. She was speaking at the inauguration of the 1066th Jayanthi celebrations of Adi Jagadguru Sri Shivara threeshwara Shivayogi Mahaswamiji at Malavalli.

Murmu said, "Our greatest strength lies in our youth... The destiny of India will be saved not only by their skill and knowledge but by their integrity and sense of purpose." Describing Karnataka as the sacred land of saints like 12th century social reformer Basaveshwara, she said his message of "work is worship" continues to inspire humanity. At the same event, Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy accused the Congress government of "neglecting" the farmers and being involved in corruption.

"I saw a report that 2,800 farmers have died by suicide after this government came to power... This government on coming to power said that it will give Rs 24,000 crore as loan to 32 lakh farmers... but till November, about Rs 12,000 crore has been paid to 24 lakh farmers," said the JD(S) leader, who turned 66 today. —*PTI*

President Droupadi Murmu during the inauguration of the 1066th Jayanthi celebrations of Adi Jagadguru Sri Shivarathreeshwara Shivayogi Mahaswamiji, at Malavalli, in Mandya district, Karnataka **PHOTO: PTI**

MONKEY FEVER RESURFACES, 8 CASES IN SHIVAMOGGA

SHIVAMOGGA, 16 DEC

Monkey Fever, also known as Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD), has resurfaced in Shivamogga district, triggering concern among residents of forest-fringe villages in the Malnad region.

Health authorities have warned of a potential larger outbreak this season, with the number of KFD-positive cases rising to eight much earlier than usual. Typically, the disease emerges around February, but this year, reports have come in early December, raising alarm.

The first case was identified last week in Billodi village of Hosanagar taluk, where a 55-year-old woman tested positive for KFD. Subsequent testing of residents in the same village confirmed the infection in seven additional individuals. Officials have stated that all patients are currently stable. In response, the Health Department has advised residents who engage in forest activities to apply tick-repellent oil (dump oil) on their skin to guard against tick bites. —*Salar News*

PROTEST TO SAVE DOGS

Members of South Bengaluru Cares demand authorities stop the alleged illegal removal of stray dogs and instead call for the implementation of Animal Birth Control (ABC), during their protest at Freedom Park on Tuesday. ABC is used to control the population of stray dog by sterlising, vaccinating, and then returning the strays into their original locations **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

MGNREGA revamp: Hariprasad calls Modi 'Mogambo'

BELAGAVI, 16 DEC

Congress leader BK Hariprasad on Tuesday strongly criticised the Centre for attempting to rename the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), comparing Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the villain "Mogambo." He said MGNREGA remains the only scheme employing the rural poor, and alleged that beyond renaming programmes, the PM has done little for the poor. The Bill proposes AI-based fraud detection, real-time monitoring, public disclosures, and mandatory social audits, along with greater oversight through central & state committees. It also shifts the scheme to a centrally sponsored with 60:40 Centre-State funding ratio, special ratios for North-East & Himalayan states, and full central funding for UTs without legislatures. —*ANI*

'UNFAIR PARKING FEE'

Drivers' union protests BIAL pick-up changes

BENGALURU, 16 DEC

Members of the Karnataka Drivers' Union staged a protest on Tuesday against recent changes to pick-up zones and parking fees at Kempegowda International Airport (BLR), officials said. The demonstration took place near the Sadahalli Gate toll plaza, led by Union Founder and State President G Narayanaswamy.

Police resorted to a mild lathi charge as protesters attempted to block other taxis from entering airport premises. Drivers claimed the revised pick-up arrangements created congestion, operational difficulties, and inconvenience for both passengers and commercial operators. They also criticised the parking fee structure, alleging it unfairly burdens drivers who rely on airport trips for their livelihood. Many drivers carried placards and raised slogans demanding immediate review and dialogue with airport authorities.

Members of the Karnataka Drivers' Union protest near the Sadahalli Gate toll plaza, in City on Tuesday **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

Bengaluru International Airport Limited (BIAL) defended the new system, stating the changes aim to ensure passenger safety and smoother movement amid rising vehicle volumes. "Private vehicles have a dedicated pick-up lane with a generous free time window, while commercial vehicles operate from designated supervised zones. Our focus is on behaviour change, safety, and orderly pick-up," the airport said.

Under the revised system, private cars may use the T1 and T2 pick-up zones free for eight minutes.

Charges apply for overstays: Rs 150 for 8–13 minutes, Rs 300 for 13–18 minutes, and vehicles overstaying beyond 18 minutes will be towed, with fines and towing costs levied.

BIAL said signage, on-ground guidance, and coordination with cab operators have been provided to facilitate smooth compliance. —*PTI*

Man held for trying to steal 500 acres of forest land

BENGALURU, 16 DEC

Police have detained MB Nemannagouda, known as MB Manmath, after he allegedly obtained a court order using forged documents to encroach upon 532 acres of forest and government land in Kengeri BM Kaval, according to Forest, Ecology and Environment Minister Eshwar B Khandre.

Khandre revealed that Manmath had previously attempted to assert ownership over 512 acres and 26 guntas of forest and government land through false documents. This prompted the Assistant Conservator of Forests to file a complaint with the Mudigere Circle Inspector's police station in Mudigere Taluk, Chikkamagaluru district, on 28 November last year, followed by a complaint from the Tahsildar.

In light of these complaints, the police registered an FIR and subsequently took Manmath into custody. Khandre has formally requested a probe by the CID or a Special Investigation Team. —*Salar News*

UP BLO dies, family blames work pressure

GONDA, 16 DEC

A Booth Level Officer (BLO) in the Katra Bazar assembly constituency of Gonda district has died during treatment in Lucknow, with his family alleging that excessive work pressure contributed to his death. Nanbachcha, 57, who served at booth number 336, passed away on Monday night at KGMU Trauma Centre in Lucknow after nine days of treatment for a brain haemorrhage. He was also a 'shiksha mitra' in a local school. His wife, Krishna Devi, claimed that he was under immense pressure from the block education officer to complete tasks under the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls. She revealed that he had fallen ill on 6 December and was later referred to Lucknow for advanced care. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Sena, MNS to ally for Mumbai civic polls: Sanjay Raut

MUMBAI, 16 DEC

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut announced on Tuesday that his party will ally with the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) for the upcoming civic polls in Mumbai, Thane, Pune, and Nashik, with a formal declaration expected within the week. Raut revealed that he has urged Congress leadership to join the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi, which should include the MNS, although Congress has left the decision to local units. Raut noted elections will occur in 29 municipal corporations, stressing that "the real battle" lies in Mumbai, a pivotal area in the Samyukta Maharashtra movement. The alliance announcement will feature both Uddhav and Raj Thackeray on stage, according to Raut, who has also approached NCP President Sharad Pawar for allaince. *—PTI*

Kerala BJP activists held for LDF leader's assault

ALAPPUZHA, 16 DEC

Six BJP activists have been arrested for allegedly assaulting a local LDF leader in a costal district, police said on Tuesday. According to the complaint of Ramjith and his friend Renith, the six BJP activists restrained them, verbally abused them, beat up Ramjith and then hit him on the head with a stick, at 9.15 on 4 December. The attack was carried out because they went to the panchayat area, the complainants claimed. The six were booked under sections 189 (unlawful assembly), 191(rioting), 296(obscene acts and songs), 126(wrongful restraint), 115(causing hurt), 118(causing grievous hurt with weapons), 351(criminal intimidation) and 109(attempt to murder) of the BNS, police said. *—PTI*

Remarks against women: CPI(M) leader booked

MALAPPURAM, 16 DEC

A case has been registered against a local leader of the ruling CPI(M), who had allegedly made remarks. A case has been registered against local CPI(M) leader Sayid Ali Majeed for allegedly making remarks against his women colleagues during a meeting. Majeed, who was elected as a panchayat member in the recent civic polls, made the remarks at a gathering in Kodakkal on Sunday, where his speech was recorded and later posted on social media, triggering sharp criticism. Tirurangadi police booked Majeed on Monday based on a complaint by Jameela, an activist of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML). He also threatened the women workers of the IUML that they would have to hear such slanders again, the complainant alleged. According to the FIR, police registered the case under two BNS sections. *—PTI*

Oppn calls G RAM G Bill 'insult' to Bapu

Priyanka Gandhi accuses Modi govt of being 'obsessive' over the name change

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

Several opposition MPs protested in the Parliament House complex over the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Bill, which was introduced in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

The bill, which seeks to guarantee rural jobs for 125 days every year and replace the 20-year-old MNREGA, has become a new flashpoint with the government, as Opposition accused the BJP-led NDA dispensation of "insulting" Mahatma Gandhi and demanded the withdrawal of the proposed legislation.

Soon after the government introduced the bill in Lok Sabha seeking to replace MGNREGA, Congress' Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Samajwadi Party Chief Akhilesh Yadav, DMK's TR Baalu, RSP's NK Premchandran, among others, held the protest at the Mahatma Gandhi statue in the complex, raising slogans like "Gandhi ji ka ye apmann nahi sahega Hindustan (country will not tolerate this insult of Mahatma Gandhi)".

Priyanka accused the government of attempting to finish off the rural employment guarantee law -- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005 -- that was implemented by the erstwhile UPA dispensation.

The opposition MPs gathered near the steps of the Makar Dwar of Parliament with pictures of Mahatma Gandhi in hand and walked to the statue of the Father of the Nation at Prerna Sthal.

Speaking with reporters, Priyanka also slammed the government for its "obsession" with changing the names of schemes. She alleged that the BJP government, by introducing a bill to repeal MGNREGA, seeks to strip millions of labourers across the country of their legal guarantee to employment.

Additionally, Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, while introducing the VB-G RAM G Bill, 2025, said the government not only believes in Mahatma Gandhi but also follows his principles.

Meanwhile, Congress will hold protests across the country on Wednesday against the Centre's rural employment bill VB-G RAM G, claiming it was a "BJP-RSS conspiracy" to dismantle a rights-based welfare scheme and attack Mahatma Gandhi's legacy, workers' rights and federal responsibility. *—PTI*

Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and other opposition MPs participate in a protest march against the VB-G RAM G Bill during the Winter session of Parliament, in New Delhi, on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

- Meanwhile, the Congress will hold protests across the country on Wednesday against the VB-G RAM G Bill

> **Then to have two languages in the title just to make the acronym G RAM G is not just a violation of Article 348, ... but it also reminds me of a song from my childhood -- 'Dekho o deewano (tum) ye kaam na karo, Ram ka naam badnaam na karo'** - Shashi Tharoor, Congress MP

'438 suicides reported in 3 yrs'

The government reported 438 suicides and seven fratricides among personnel of the Central Armed Police Forces, the Assam Rifles and the National Security Guard over past three years, with the highest number of suicides recorded in Central Reserve Police Force, followed by the Border Security Force and the Central Industrial Security Force. *—PTI*

'Bangla border saw 1,100 infiltrations'

The India-Bangladesh border recorded the highest incidence of unlawful crossings, with 1,104 infiltration attempts and over 2,556 arrests reported from Jan to Nov, government data presented in LS said. Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai said that 79.08 per cent of the Bangladesh border and 93.25 per cent of Pakistan border fenced. *—PTI*

NATIONAL HERALD CASE

Illegality, malafide intent of Modi govt exposed: Congress

BENGALURU/NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

Chief Minister **Siddaramaiah** welcomed the Delhi Court's refusal to accept the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) chargesheet against Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi in the National Herald case, asserting that it reveals the "illegality" and "malafide intent" of the Modi government.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar echoed these sentiments, claiming the government's misuse of power has been laid bare.

The court noted that the ED's chargesheet was based on a complaint from a private individual, not an FIR involving a predicate offence, rendering it impermissible. Siddaramaiah stated, "With no FIR, no proceeds of crime, no money laundering, and no movement of property, this decade-long political witch-hunt has been defeated." He expressed solidarity with Gandhi and Rahul, praising their resilience against perceived political vendetta.

The Congress party asserted in a statement that the court ruling demonstrates that the government's case against their leaders is "completely illegal and mala fide."

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge highlighted the court's decision as a repudiation of what he termed a "political revenge" conspiracy.

Congress spokesperson KC Venugopal characterised the ruling as a "tight slap" to those attempting to tarnish the reputations of Sonia and Rahul Gandhi.

The ED has announced plans to appeal against the ruling, indicating that the legal battle is not over. *—PTI*

> **Truth and Justice Prevail! The Modi government's misuse of power and malafide intent have now been exposed before the nation.**
> -DK Shivakumar, Karnataka DyCM

Victory for justice: AICC Secretary

BENGALURU, 16 DEC

AICC Secretary and Congress leader Mansoor Ali Khan has termed the decision of the Delhi court to reject the charge sheet filed by the Enforcement Directorate at the behest of the BJP government at the Centre to implicate Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi in the National Herald case as a victory for justice and a defeat for lies.

On Tuesday, he said in a statement that by doing justice in this case, the Delhi court has sent a message to the constitutional investigation agencies to work impartially without becoming a tool of the ruling party.

He said that the National Herald case is years old and has nothing to do with Sonia Gandhi or Rahul Gandhi, yet they were investigated with a motive of political vendetta to harass them and the ED filed a chargesheet.

Khan said that this court decision has strengthened the public's faith in the courts of the country and has ensured that the attempts of governments to target their rivals to achieve their political objectives are wrong.

He said that the Central government, frightened by the nationwide awareness campaign launched by Rahul against vote theft, tried to incite the National Herald case but it has had to face the consequences in court.

The FIR against Sonia and Rahul was lodged out of political frustration, as the Congress was exposing the failures of the BJP government in the last 11 years, he said.

The investigating agencies were being used by them as a private army.

Repeatedly targeting the Gandhi family reflects a mentality of revenge, intimidation and fear-mongering, but maintained that the family will never bow down because it stands firmly with the truth, Khan added.

The AICC leader said reiterated that truth has prevailed and will always prevail.

He also condemned the central government's move to change the name of the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGA). Mansoor Ali Khan said that it seems that the Modi government is annoyed by the names of the freedom fighters who participated in the freedom struggle of this country, including Mahatma Gandhi. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

Modi arrives at Ethiopia as part of 3-nation tour

ADDIS ABABA/AMMAN, 16 DEC

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said he was looking forward to engaging with the Ethiopian leadership to further strengthen the partnership in diverse areas, as he arrived in the African nation on his maiden bilateral visit.

On arrival at the airport, in a warm and special gesture, PM Modi was received by his Ethiopian counterpart Abiy Ahmed Ali and accorded a warm and colourful welcome.

Modi will also address the Joint Session of Parliament and share his thoughts on India's journey as the From Ethiopia, Modi will visit Oman on the final leg of this three-nation tour.

Meanwhile, his visit to Jordan, which wrapped up on the same day, was marked by significant agreements aimed at bolstering bilateral cooperation in various sectors.

During his time in Jordan, Modi emphasised a "meaningful expansion" of cooperation, with agreements signed in culture, renewable energy, water management, and digital innovation.

Neena Malhotra, Secretary (South) in the Ministry of External Affairs, reported that King Abdullah II expressed strong support for India's fight against terrorism, reinforcing the shared values between the nations.. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

J&K graveyard search yields arms haul

SRINAGAR, 16 DEC

Security forces on Tuesday recovered arms and ammunition from a graveyard in Srinagar's Natipora area during a search operation linked to an ongoing terror investigation, officials said.

A police team, accompanied by a forensic science laboratory team and an executive magistrate, carried out the search at the graveyard as part of a case registered under Section 13 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act at Bemina police station in 2015.

During the operation, officials said, the team recovered a Chinese hand grenade, 10 live AK-47 rounds, around 100 grams of gunpowder and about 20 posters suspected to be linked to terror propaganda. The seized material was taken into custody for further examination & investigation.

Separately, the Counter Intelligence wing of the Jammu and Kashmir Police conducted pre-dawn raids at multiple locations across the Valley as part of a broader crackdown on terror networks, officials said.

The raids were carried out across seven districts in connection with a terror crime case involving suspects accused of terrorism, glorifying terrorists and promoting radicalisation, they added.

Officials said the coordinated searches were aimed at identifying recruitment networks, tracing logistical support and curbing the spread of extremist ideology in the region overall, officials added further today. *—PTI*

Security personnel keep vigil amid high alert after arms and ammunition were recovered from a graveyard in the Natipora, in Srinagar **PHOTO: PTI**

Gujarat court rejects separate trial plea of Kejriwal, Singh

AHMEDABAD, 16 DEC

A sessions court in Ahmedabad has denied pleas from AAP leaders Arvind Kejriwal and Sanjay Singh seeking separate trials in a criminal defamation case concerning their remarks about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's educational degree. The Additional Sessions Judge MP Purohit dismissed the leaders' revision applications, which challenged an earlier trial court decision to consolidate the proceedings.

Gujarat University initiated the defamation case following what it described as "sarcastic and derogatory" comments made by the two leaders regarding the university's reputation. The court noted that both accused made their statements on 1 and 2 April 2023, as members of the same political party, appearing "animated by a common purpose." *—PTI*

SIR & THE WALKING DEAD

TMC chief declared 'dead' walks into crematorium

KOLKATA, 16 DEC

A Trinamool Congress councillor on Tuesday walked into a crematorium near Kolkata and demanded that his last rites be performed, claiming that the Election Commission listed him among the "dead" in the draft electoral rolls.

A booth-wise list of the deceased and migrated voters was released ahead of West Bengal's draft electoral rolls earlier in the day.

Surya Dey, the TMC councillor of Dankuni Municipality's Ward 18, said that while checking the lists linked to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise, he claimed his name figured among the "dead", though he had filled and submitted his enumeration form to the booth-level officer.

"Since the Commission has declared me dead, it should complete the process," Dey told reporters as he walked into Kalipur crematorium, flanked by supporters.

"Let the officials come and cremate me."

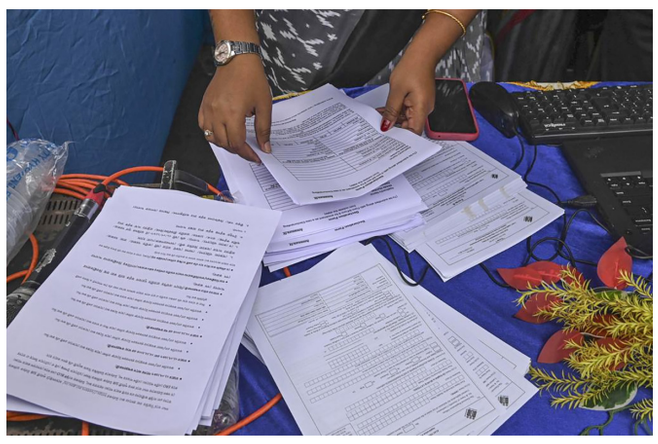
He called this administrative absurdity with serious consequences.

"I am an elected public representative. If I can be shown dead on paper while I am very much alive, imagine what can happen to ordinary voters," he said.

The episode quickly travelled from the crematorium to social media.

Standing at the crematorium, the TMC councillor underlined the point he wanted to remember, even if the rolls had erased him.

"I walked here myself," he said. "I am breathing, talking, protesting. If this is how voters are being treated, democracy itself is being taken to the pyre." *—PTI*



ECI officials assist voters at a help desk camp for the Special Intensive Revision of Electoral Rolls **PHOTO: PTI**

IUML 'purification ritual' in Kozhikode sparks Left protests

KOZHIKODE, 16 DEC

A protest erupted at the Changaroth panchayat office in Kozhikode on Tuesday after the CPI(M)'s youth wing, the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI), marched against an alleged "purification ritual" carried out by Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) activists a day earlier, police said.

The protest was peaceful and no tension was reported, police added, noting that the Left Democratic Front (LDF) will hold another march later in the evening. Police said that on Monday, during victory celebrations, a group of United Democratic Front (UDF) activists sprinkled green-coloured water and swept the area outside the panchayat office. Television visuals showed people carrying IUML flags performing the act.

Former panchayat president Unni Vengeri alleged IUML activists were responsible, saying Congress workers merely watched. He said no such celebrations occurred in three other panchayats won by the UDF.

"The only difference here is that the former president belonged to the Dalit community. If people see this as a casteist insult, can they be faulted?" Vengeri asked, calling the incident emotionally hurtful and alleging the IUML acted with a specific agenda. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Delhi cops crack down on digital fraud, 10 held

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

An international digital fraud syndicate, allegedly responsible for deceiving victims of over Rs 50 crore by impersonating law enforcement officials, has been dismantled with the arrest of 10 individuals, including the alleged mastermind, police have confirmed. Raids were conducted across seven states, including Delhi, Maharashtra, Kerala, Odisha, Punjab, UP, and Haryana, following a probe that originated in southeast Delhi. "One of the accused was arrested at Mumbai airport while attempting to fly to Dubai," a police officer reported. The syndicate executed a digital arrest scam via threatening video calls, coercing targets into transferring money to evade arrest. The probe revealed involvement of a larger interstate network. *—PTI*

Two country-made bombs found in Kerala's Kannur

KANNUR, 16 DEC

Two country-made bombs were discovered at a deserted plot in the Kannur district on Tuesday, prompting immediate action from local authorities. The explosives were located near the Sree Narayana Math in Kutteri. Upon receiving the information, a bomb disposal squad promptly arrived at the site to safely defuse the devices. In light of this incident, police have heightened surveillance in the area due to concerns over a potential law-and-order situation in this politically sensitive district. Local sources indicated that the authorities are taking these developments seriously to ensure public safety amid growing tensions. Further investigations are ongoing to ascertain the origins of the explosives. *—PTI*

Rajasthan HC, Sessions court get bomb threat

JAIPUR, 16 DEC

Police conducted intensive searches at the Rajasthan High Court and Sessions Court premises on Tuesday after a bomb threat was received via email, officials said. The message, sent to the Sessions Court's email ID, claimed explosives had been planted inside the high court judges' chambers, prompting an immediate security alert.Police teams, dog squads and bomb disposal experts rushed to both court complexes and carried out thorough checks across all sensitive areas. No suspicious objects were found during the operation, and the premises were subsequently cleared for normal functioning, police said. Authorities noted that similar threats targeting the HC and other buildings have been reported in the state. *—PTI*

Delhi: 14 killings in 15 days, minors' role alarming

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

At least 14 murders were reported across Delhi in the first 15 days of the month, with police identifying the involvement of at least 17 minors, officials said Tuesday. Victims included a woman and a minor, with cases reported from Rohini, east Delhi, Shahdara, southeast and north Delhi. A senior officer said motives ranged from financial disputes and robberies to sudden flare-ups over petty issues. Several killings followed snatching attempts, robberies that met resistance, personal relationship disputes and neighbourhood quarrels. Police said that except for a December 15 incident in northeast Delhi, where two brothers were shot dead, all other murders involved sharp-edged weapons, mainly knives. "Knives are accessible," an officer said. Police termed minors' involvement serious . *—PTI*

The disruptions followed severe fog on Monday that led to over 200 cancellations at the country's busiest airport, causing cascading effects nationwide, including disruptions at Mumbai airport **PHOTO: ANI**

Fog grounds 126 flights in Delhi

Arrivals stabilised, but departures delayed

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

Low visibility caused by dense fog continued to disrupt flight operations at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport on Tuesday, triggering cancellations and delays, airport officials said.

A Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL) official said 49 departures and 77 arrivals had been cancelled due to poor visibility. While arrivals stabilised by Tuesday afternoon, departures continued to face an average delay of around 35 minutes, data showed.

The disruptions followed severe fog on Monday that led to over 200 cancellations and more than 800 delays at the country's busiest airport, causing cascading effects nationwide, including disruptions at Mumbai airport.

In an advisory issued at 12.20pm on Tuesday, DIAL said flight operations were "running smooth" but cautioned that some arrivals and departures could still be affected. The airport operator urged passengers to stay in touch with airlines for updates and said on-ground staff were deployed to assist travellers.

IndiGo, the largest carrier at Delhi airport, said it cancelled 110 flights across its network on Tuesday due to weather-related disruptions.

"As winter sets in, early mornings across northern India can bring fog that may occasionally slow down flight movements," the airline said in a post on X.

"Our teams are prepared and closely monitoring weather conditions," IndiGo said, adding that wherever possible, "we are making thoughtful adjustments on the ground to reduce inconvenience and ensure any waiting time is as comfortable as possible." Other airlines issued advisories warning passengers of delays and advised them to check status before heading to the airport. *—Agencies*

Children bereaved in Mathura crash

MATHURA, 16 DEC

Gulzari spent the day moving between hospitals in Uttar Pradesh's Mathura, desperately searching for his sister-in-law, Parvati, who went missing after a pre-dawn pile-up on the Yamuna Expressway amid dense fog. While Parvati managed to save her two children, her own fate remains unknown.

Outside the post-mortem house, Gulzari told reporters that, according to his niece and nephew, their mother threw them out through a broken window of the bus after it caught fire, before collapsing with shards of glass lodged in her neck. That was the last time the children saw her.

Police said at least 13 people were killed and 43 injured when the pile-up triggered a massive fire around 4.30 am. Eight buses and three smaller vehicles collided in near-zero visibility, an officer said.

With several bodies charred beyond recognition, authorities have begun DNA testing to identify victims. Three deceased have been identified so far: Akhilendra Pratap Yadav, 44, of Prayagraj, Rampal, 75, from Maharajganj district, and Sultan Ahmed, 62, of Gonda.

Senior SP Shlok Kumar said remains would be matched with DNA samples of relatives searching for missing kin, warning that the toll could rise. DM Chandra Prakash Singh said arrangements were being made for the last rites of identified victims.

Residents said the crash could be heard kilometres away, with flames visible from a distance. Dense fog hampered rescue operations, as charred vehicle shells and scattered debris bore grim testimony to the scale of the tragedy. *—PTI*

A crane removes the charred shell of a bus from the Yamuna Expressway after a fog-hit pile-up involving buses and cars sparked fires, in Mathura, Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

UP man's lover found dead at his home

BARABANKI, 16 DEC

A 31-year-old married woman was discovered murdered, allegedly hacked to death, at the home of her lover in Sahavpur town, Barabanki district. Police suspect that the man's parents and four sisters are implicated in the crime and are currently absconding.

Sandeep, a recent groom who married just a month ago, was in a relationship with Mamta, a married woman from Gorakhpur. The incident transpired on Monday night while Sandeep's parents and sisters were present at home; his wife was at her maternal residence.

Everything seemed normal until nearly 6am when Sandeep stepped outside. Upon returning, he found Mamta's blood-soaked body, accompanied by a blood-stained axe. He subsequently alerted the police, alleging that his parents were responsible for the murder. Circle Officer Ramnagar Garima Pant stated, "The body has been sent for post-mortem, and efforts are on to trace the absconding." Probe is currently on from multiple angles, and the victim's family has been informed. *—PTI*

PROBE FLAGS 'GRAVE LAPSES'

The committee recommended departmental action against agencies handling stadium operations **PHOTO: PTI**

Messi event: Notice to DGP, DyCP suspended

KOLKATA, 16 DEC

West Bengal government on Tuesday issued show-cause notices to senior police officers, including DGP Rajeev Kumar, over alleged mismanagement during the Lionel Messi event at Salt Lake Stadium last week, and suspended a DyCP following recommendations of a probe panel.

According to a statement from Chief Secretary Manoj Pant's office, Bidhannagar CP Mukesh Kumar was also show-caused, while DyCP Aneesh Sarkar was suspended and departmental proceedings initiated for negligence of duty. Youth Affairs and Sports Department Principal Secretary Rajesh Kumar Sinha was served a notice, and the services of stadium CEO Deb Kumar Nandan were withdrawn with immediate effect.

Acting on the findings of the three-member committee headed by retired Justice Asim Kumar Roy, the state constituted a Special Investigation Team of four IPS officers to probe the chaos during the 13 December event, which was cut short after vandalism inside the stadium caused damage estimated at Rs 2 crore.

The panel flagged "grave" violations of SOPs particularly the presence of water bottles inside the stadium. "As per existing rules, spectators are not permitted to carry water bottles," Roy said.

The committee recommended departmental action against agencies handling stadium operations. Event organiser Shatadru Dutta was arrested. *—PTI*

Goa fire fallout: 'Cape Goa' eatery sealed

PANAJI, 16 DEC

Authorities have sealed a cliff-side restaurant 'The Cape Goa' in South Goa for violating fire and safety norms, officials said Tuesday, in the aftermath of a nightclub blaze in the state.

The action follows a fire at a nightclub in Arpora, North Goa, on 6 December that killed 25 people.

The sealing order was issued on Monday by Maya Pednekar, chairperson of the joint enforcement and monitoring committee, Canacona taluk.

An inspection conducted on 12 December found that the Tourism Department had permitted only one temporary private shack, but the establishment was operating a full-fledged restaurant beyond the sanctioned plinth area.

Continued operations without mandatory clearances posed an "imminent, grave threat to human life and property," the order said.

The committee found the premises overcrowded, lacking approved structural plans and stability certificates.

The kitchen and pantry had no proper exits, while 29 commercial LPG cylinders were stored in an unsafe condition, without gas leak detectors or a designated LPG bank.

Firefighting equipment was absent across key areas of the premises, exits were obstructed, electrical wiring was unsafe, and evacuation signage was missing, the order noted officially. *—PTI*

An inspection revealed that the establishment was operating a full-fledged restaurant beyond the sanctioned plinth area **PHOTO: X@ THECAPEGOA**

SRINAGAR AT -1.8°C

Coldwave grips Kashmir, Rajasthan

SRINAGAR/JAIPUR, 16 DEC

After a brief respite, Kashmir saw a sharp drop in night temperatures on Tuesday, with minimum readings slipping below freezing across most of the valley, officials said. Srinagar recorded minus 1.8 degrees Celsius, nearly four degrees lower than Monday night, while thick fog engulfed the city and other areas, especially near water bodies, the Meteorological Department said.

Qazigund logged minus 2.2 degrees Celsius, Kupwara minus 1.8 and Kokernag minus 0.6. Pahalgam recorded a low of minus 2.6 degrees, while Konibal and Pulwama were the coldest at minus 4.0 degrees. Gulmarg was the only location where the minimum temperature stayed above freezing, settling at 0.5 degrees Celsius.

The valley is inching towards 'Chillai Kalan', the 40-day harshest winter period beginning 21 December. The Met office forecast partly cloudy weather till 18 December, with the possibility of light rain or snow at scattered places till 21 December.

Meanwhile, Rajasthan continued to reel under intense cold, with most areas record-

People walk along the Amarnath track as fresh snowfall blankets the area, in Baltal, Jammu and Kashmir **PHOTO: PTI**

Centre to set up NIA courts nationwide

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

The Centre on Tuesday told the Supreme Court it will set up a dedicated NIA court in every state and UT, and more than one where anti-terror cases exceed 10, to ensure speedy trials.

The Delhi government said 16 special courts will be created to try organised crime and terror cases. A bench of CJI Surya Kant and others urged the Centre and Delhi to consider a stringent NCR-wide law like MCOCA to curb jurisdictional gaps.

Referring to gangster Mahesh Khatri's delayed trial plea, the CJI said hardened criminals exploit inter-state overlaps. The court suggested invoking the NIA Act in multi-state FIR cases, stressed creating infra, not re-designating courts. *—PTI*

FIR REGISTERED AGAINST UNKNOWN

Drone spotted over Nagpur defence airstrip

NAGPUR, 16 DEC

An unidentified drone flying over the private airstrip of Nagpur-based defence manufacturer Solar Industries has triggered a security probe, officials said on Tuesday, raising concerns over the safety of sensitive installations.

A First Information Report has been registered against an unidentified person at Kondhali police station, and an investigation is under way, Superintendent of Police Dr Harssh Poddar said.

The drone was spotted at around 7.15pm on 9 December over the company's airstrip on the Nagpur–Amravati road, about 40km from the city. Owing to darkness, the exact size and make of the drone could not be ascertained, an official from Kondhali police station said.

Security personnel of the Solar Group noticed blinking lights in the sky and immediately informed senior officials, who alerted the local police. "An immediate probe was ordered," the official said.

Police teams searched nearby villages to determine whether the drone had been launched for a wedding or private function and had inadvertently strayed into restricted airspace. Searches were conducted in Malkapur, Shiva and Sawanga villages, but no leads have emerged so far.

Teams were stationed in these villages for two days, but their efforts did not yield any results, police said. A team from the Intelligence Bureau is also probing the incident, a senior official confirmed.

Solar Industries is a key defence supplier and manufactures indigenous weaponised drones, military explosives, rocket integration systems, loitering munitions, anti-drone missiles, bombs and warheads for the armed forces.

Authorities have intensified monitoring around strategic facilities after aerial intrusion. *—PTI*

4 minors contract HIV in MP after blood transfusions

SATNA/BHOPAL, 16 DEC

- A probe has been ordered to know if the transfusions occurred only at government hospital or elsewhere

Four children with thalassemia have tested HIV positive at Satna district hospital in Madhya Pradesh, with officials suspecting contaminated blood transfusions or infected needles, authorities said on Tuesday.

Health Minister Rajendra Shukla said a probe has been ordered to determine whether the transfusions occurred only at the government hospital or elsewhere. The children, aged between 12 and 15, had received repeated transfusions from the hospital blood bank.

Blood bank in-charge Devendra Patel said an investigation is under way. "Either an infected needle was used or a blood transfusion occurred. Blood transfusion seems the most likely cause," he told PTI Videos.

Family members tested negative, officials said. The Opposition Congress targeted government, calling incident a failure and demanding minister's resignation immediately. *—PTI*

NO PANDAS IN JAPAN AFTER 50 YEARS

Japan's beloved twin pandas at a local zoo are set to return to China in January 2026, a move that will leave the country without any panda for the first time in nearly 50 years. The chances of securing another panda loan, long seen as a soft-power emblem of Sino-Japanese friendship, appear uncertain as relations between the two neighbours continue to fray. Thousands visited the zoo to have a last look at the cherished animals before their departure. ***PHOTO: KYODO***

It's challenges aplenty for SIR's next phase

Stiff challenges lay in wait before the Election Commission for the upcoming hearing phase of SIR in West Bengal, with difficulties likely to outweigh those during the now-concluded enumeration period, said Subrata Gupta, the EC-appointed special observer for the exercise.

Speaking exclusively to PTI on the eve of Tuesday's publication of the politically hypersensitive list, where names of over 58 lakh voters are likely to be deleted in the draft roll itself, Gupta said the hearing phase challenges are likely to be daunting in the wake of the paucity of Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and Assistant EROs (or AEROs) in the state, who would be conducting the mammoth task over the next 45 days or so.

The commission has revealed that of the 7.66 crore enumeration forms that were issued for electors based on their presence in the 2025 rolls in the state, over 58 lakh forms were found "uncollected" on grounds of voters either remaining absent at their registered addresses, permanently shifted, dead or with duplicate roll entries.

"Of the total enumeration forms we collected, there are over 1.34 crore that contain logical discrepancies. The inconsistencies range from same names appearing both as father and mother of certain voters to abnormal age differences between electors and their parents or grandparents. These errors may be bonafide in nature. They could also be malafide.

"Some 30 lakh unmapped forms with the 2002 list have also been received, which are included in this discrepancy list. Over 85 lakh forms are riddled with name mismatch issues with the 2002 rolls. Then there would be claims and objections from aggrieved voters whose names get deleted from the draft rolls. We have to conduct hearings for each of these cases to ensure we publish an accurate final roll," the retired IAS officer said.

Each officer will have to conduct anywhere between 50 to 100 hearings or 500 minutes a day ***PHOTO: PTI***

Although Gupta said it would be premature to predict the exact number of voters who would be brought under the purview of hearings, a quasi-judicial process, a senior EC official said he wouldn't be surprised if that figure touched the 2-crore mark.

Gupta informed PTI that currently, the state is armed with a total of 3,300 EROs and AEROs. Simple maths would reveal that each of those officers would have to conduct hearings of close to 140 applicants every day for the next 45 days to complete the process.

Even if each hearing took a modest 10 minutes, it would mean that the daily hearing schedule would have to last for twenty-three-and-a-half hours, an impossibility.

"We have requested the EC to provide us with an additional 2,500-3,000 EROs/AEROs. Once those appointments are finalised, we have done a rough calculation that each officer will then have to conduct between 50 and 100 hearings a day, which itself would be a stiff task since that would entail a daily hearing span of over 500 minutes which doesn't happen even at high courts," Gupta stated.

Stressing the need to impart "quality training to the EROs and AEROs" ahead of the hearings, the special observer said that both competence and knowledge of the officers about the quasi-judicial exercise would be quintessential in ensuring that an accurate final roll is published.

The tricky bit of completing the phase by the scheduled deadline of 7 February next year would also entail printing and distribution of hearing notices to applicants in duplicate, logging those notices in the EC database and arranging alternative hearing dates in the eventuality of an applicant's inability to attend the session on valid grounds, he added.

Gupta said that surveillance of the BLO-driven enumeration through his initial appointment as special observer and subsequent appointments of five other special observers took the number of deleted voters from 32 lakh to 58 lakh in quick time over the last 12 days of the phase.

"The challenge was psychological. The pressure on the officers was initially only from the politicians. The observers brought about the counter-pressure which changed the work environment," he said.

Gupta, however, admitted that there were lapses on the part of the commission in informing voters about the SIR exercise in greater detail.

"The 2002 rolls were in manual mode. Our IT team faced huge challenges in digitising them, and even then, technical loopholes have accounted for mapping mismatches," he said.

Asked what voters in West Bengal can expect out of the draft rolls and whether they should brace for unpleasant surprises, Gupta said, "There would be many more pleasant surprises than unpleasant ones in the draft rolls." *—PTI*

SALAR سالار

Higher education to have single regulator

The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan Bill which seeks to set up an overarching higher education commission was introduced in Lok Sabha on Monday. Here is an explainer on the Bill:

Bill for a higher education commission ***PHOTO: PTI***

1. What has the Bill proposed?

The Bill proposes setting up an overarching higher education commission along with three councils for regulation, accreditation and ensuring academic standards for universities and higher education institutions (HEI) in India.

2. The institutions under the commission

The commission will cover all central universities and colleges,institutes of national importance functioning under the administrative purview of the Ministry of Education including IITs, NITs, IISc, IISERs, IIMs, and IIITs.

3. What will be the composition?

The commission will be headed by a chairperson appointed by the President of India. Besides the chairperson, there will be 12 members who will also be appointed by the President.

Each of the three councils will be headed by the respective presidents, who will be a professor with at least 10 years of experience. The presidents will be appointed for an initial period of three years, extendable up to five years.

The councils will have 14 members. Both the president and members of the council, except for ex-officio members and member-secretary, will be appointed by the President of India on the recommendation of a search-cum-selection committee of the central government. The President will have the power to remove the chairperson, president of different councils and its members in case of dereliction of duty.

4. What happens at present?

The UGC regulates non-technical higher-education institutions, the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) oversees technical education, and the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) regulates teacher education. The Bill proposes to repeal these three agencies.

5. Councils and their proposed role:

The three councils have been named the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Viniyaman Parishad (regulatory council), the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Gunvatta Parishad (accreditation council) and the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Manak Parishad (standards council).

The regulatory council will operate as common regulator for higher education in India, while the accreditation council will be an accrediting body to supervise and oversee an independent ecosystem of accreditation. The standards council will take all such steps it thinks fit for the determination of academic standards in HEIs.

6. What about funding?

It is proposed to keep the funding to the centrally funded higher educational institutes out of the purview of the Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan. The National Education Policy, 2020 also envisions that the function of funding should be segregated from the councils performing the functions of academic standard setting, regulation and accreditation.

Thus, to ensure that the Standards Council, Regulatory Council and the Accreditation Council fully discharge their specific domain functions, the function of disbursal of grants to the centrally funded higher educational institutions shall be accordingly ensured through mechanisms devised by the Ministry of Education. *—PTI*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Pakistan's 'fake weddings' bring real joy, signals a cultural shift

The wedding stage looks inconspicuous at first glance: marigold, with bright, cheery yellow tones adorning where the bride and groom sit.

It seems like a typical Pakistani mehndi, part of the country's traditional three-day wedding festivities, yet a closer look reveals something unusual: the groom is a woman. This isn't a same-sex marriage but a "fake wedding," an organised event giving people the chance to get together and enjoy a night out, free from social pressure.

Pakistan's fake wedding trend, which has been gaining traction since 2023, replicates the aesthetics and festivities of a "real" wedding, but without the commitment or family pressures that usually define Pakistani marriages.

This type of event increased in popularity after a fake wedding organised by Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) in 2023 gained national and global attention on traditional and social media.

Viral fake wedding triggers backlash

The media coverage caused a significant backlash and criticism alongside its increasing popularity among young people and influencers.

Sairam H. Miran, a former president of the LUMS Student Council, told DW that students at the university faced considerable "online abuse" after footage from the event went viral.

LUMS, like many other Pakistani universities, organises weekly social events for students and believed that fake weddings provided a more traditional and socially-sanctioned space for celebration.

However, following the backlash, the student council and university took precautions to ensure students' safety and privacy.

"There were consequences for the admin who are answerable to donors and parents, and we students who did not consent to becoming viral faced problems with our families as well," Zara*, a LUMS student who graduated in 2023, told DW. "The groom didn't face problems with his family but the bride's family were very angry," she added.

Zara asked DW News not to use her real name due to negative consequences after footage from the fake wedding went viral.

Fake weddings as gendered safe spaces

Enjoying wedding festivities without societal or family pressure is why these fake wedding events are so attractive, especially to women.

Women-only mehndi gives women the opportunity to enjoy the wedding without any social pressure or family scrutiny ***PHOTO: DW News***

Rida Imran, founder of Hunar Creative Market, organised a collaborative women-only fake wedding with other artisans, artists, content creators and event managers in November.

Imran told DW that the mehendi event of a traditional Pakistani wedding, usually the first-day event of a typically three-day wedding, especially brings women together to apply henna, sing, dance and celebrate.

However, for most families, women are still under tremendous social pressure to behave in a non-boisterous way at weddings.

"Even though wedding celebrations are such an integral part of our culture and tradition, women still face a lot of scrutiny in how they act, look and celebrate," said Imran.

"Having this women-only mehndi gave women the opportunity to enjoy the wedding without any pressure from society or family scrutiny."

Authenticity outshines Western weddings

Punjrush, a standup comedian and content creator who played the role of "bride," shared that, as a single woman, she never imagined experiencing such a "drama-free wedding." She usually feels there is tension between family members or pressures to follow social norms.

She added that the event felt like a "decolonising moment," since brand promotions and exhibitions follow a Westernised template, whereas Pakistan's shaadi culture is authentically South Asian.

In addition to authenticity, the sense of safety women feel at fake weddings stands in sharp contrast to other events in the country, such as raves and parties, which are often shadowed by safety concerns.

For example, in October 2024, police raided a Halloween party in Karachi, the capital of Pakistan's Sindh province, an event widely circulated through news reports and social media and labelled as a "vulgar activity". Many female attendees had their photos and videos leaked online, breaching their privacy.

Journalist and social commentator, Shifa Leghari said, "These events are also often ticketed or curated so they have controlled entry points and are very culturally appropriate, women are free to enjoy and men know to act respectfully as well as it is part of the culture of the wedding."

A growing market for celebration

Within the industrial complex of Pakistani weddings, fake weddings have carved out a considerable niche, yet there is speculation about whether this trend fuels the ever-expanding lavish wedding industry or provides an alternative market outside the mainstream.

Pakistan's wedding ecosystem — including venues, catering, designer fashion, jewelry, photography and makeup artists — is estimated to be worth at 900 billion Pakistani rupees ($3.2 billion) annually.

Some organisers of fake weddings argue that rather than toeing the line, they provide alternative standards, ideas, vendors and services as they are based on creativity.

Aqeel Muhammad, an event curator, said, "You are free to express your style and self in an elevated way if done creatively," he told DW.

*Name changed to protect identity. *—DW*

Turkey downs drone near Russian 'shadow fleet'

ISTANBUL, 16 DEC

Turkey has shot down an "out of control" aerial drone approaching its airspace from the Black Sea, according to a statement from the Defence Ministry on Monday. This incident follows Ukrainian attacks on Russian "shadow fleet" tankers off Turkey's coast and recent warnings from Turkish officials regarding the risk of the Ukraine conflict spreading. F-16 fighter planes were deployed after detecting the object; the drone was shot down in a safe area to prevent any harm to civilians. The Ministry did not specify the location or timing of the incident. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan condemned prior attacks, labelling them as threats to "navigational safety, life and the environment, especially in our own exclusive zone." *—PTI*

US bombs 3 boats in Pacific, kills 8

WASHINGTON, 16 DEC

The US military on Monday reported that it conducted strikes on three boats accused of drug smuggling in the eastern Pacific, resulting in the deaths of eight individuals. The military defended these actions, asserting they targeted "designated terrorist organisations," with fatalities comprising three from the first vessel, two from the second, and three from the third. Despite posting a video of one boat exploding, the military did not provide evidence of drug trafficking. President Donald Trump justified the strikes as necessary to address the drug flow into the United States, as scrutiny from Congress intensifies over the campaign that has claimed at least 95 lives in 25 known strikes since early September. *—PTI*

US identifies National Guards killed in Syria

WASHINGTON, 16 DEC

The US Army has identified two Iowa National Guard members, Sgt Edgar Brian Torres-Tovar, 25, and Sgt William Nathaniel Howard, 29, who were killed in a weekend attack in Syria, attributed to the Islamic State group. Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds ordered flags to fly at half-staff in their honour. Also reported dead was a US civilian interpreter, while three Guard members sustained injuries. The attack, which occurred in the Syrian desert, marks a critical juncture in US-Syrian relations following an expansion of military cooperation. President Donald Trump pledged effective retaliation, asserting that IS would be "hit hard" and reaffirmed support for Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa, distancing him from the attack's implications. *— PTI*

After scare, Japan lifts megaquake advisory

TOKYO, 16 DEC

Japan has lifted a megaquake advisory for the northeastern coast following a magnitude 7.5 earthquake a week prior, which had heightened fears of a subsequent major quake. As a result, residents are no longer required to sleep dressed for emergencies with preparedness kits at their bedside. Officials from the Japan Meteorological Agency stressed that while the risk has decreased, vigilance remains crucial. The quake caused mild damage and more than 40 injuries, prompting tsunami alerts, though no significant tsunami damages were recorded. Municipalities reacted calmly to the advisory, in sharp contrast to past panic responses, highlighting improvements in preparedness strategies since the devastating 2011 disaster prompted changes in advisory protocols. *—PTI*

US proposes security guarantees to Ukraine

Zelenskyy says peace deal to be presented to Russia in days

KYIV, 16 DEC

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the peace deal being negotiated with US envoys will be finalised and presented to Russia within a few days. US officials said that Washington's envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner have agreed to provide unspecified security guarantees to Ukraine as part of a peace deal to end Russia's nearly four-year war.

Zelenskyy told reporters late Monday that a draft peace plan discussed with the US during talks in Berlin earlier in the day is "very workable." He cautioned, however, that some key issues — notably what happens to Ukrainian territory occupied by invading Russian forces — remain unresolved. He said that after Ukraine hashes out the peace deal, US envoys will meet their Russian counterparts in Miami soon.

The US officials said the offer of security guarantees won't be on the table "forever." Trump is likely to table it in the American Senate soon.

In a statement, European leaders in Berlin said they and the US committed to work together to provide "robust security guarantees," including a European-led "multinational force Ukraine" supported by the US.

They said the force's work would include "operating inside Ukraine" as well as assisting in rebuilding Ukraine's forces, securing its skies and supporting safer seas. They said Ukrainian forces should remain at a peacetime level of 800,000.

American officials on Monday said that there's a consensus from Ukraine and Europe on about 90 per cent of the US-authored peace plan. Trump said, "I think we're closer now than we have ever been, ever, to a peace settlement.

However, Russian President Vladimir Putin may baulk at some of the proposals thrashed out by officials from Washington, Kyiv and Western Europe, as Kremlin spokesperson said Moscow want's a complete end to the war and not a truce.

Putin wants all the areas in the four key regions that his forces have seized, as well as the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow illegally annexed in 2014, to be recognised as Russian territory.

Zelenskyy ruled out recognising Moscow's control over any part of the Donbas, and stressed that any potential free economic zone doesn't cede territory. *—PTI*

Ukraine's underwater drone 'destroys' Russian submarine

KYIV, 16 DEC

Ukraine said that its underwater drone hit and destroyed a Russian submarine used to launch cruise missiles at Ukraine. The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) called it a first in modern warfare. Moscow, however, has denied the claimed.

The SBU said its "Sub Sea Baby" underwater drones struck a Russian Kilo-class attack submarine at the port of Russia's Novorossiysk, Moscow's most important remaining Black Sea naval base, on Monday. Ukraine said that the cost of the submarine costs $400 million.

However, Russia's denied the charge. "None of the ships or submarines of the Black Sea Fleet stationed were damaged," Russia's Black Sea Fleet said. *—Agencies*

Australia Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, meets Bondi Beach terror attack hero Ahmed al-Ahmed at St George Hospital in Sydney ***PHOTO: PTI***

Bondi Beach shooters linked to Islamic State

MELBOURNE, 16 DEC

A mass shooting in which 15 people were killed during a Hanukkah celebration at Sydney's Bondi Beach was "a terrorist attack inspired by Islamic State," Australia's federal police commissioner Krissy Barrett said Tuesday.

The father and son suspects are believed to have visited the Philippines a month before the shooting. Police are probing the visit to see if there was any connection.

The father, Sajid Akram, was shot dead. His son, Naveed Akram, was being treated at a hospital.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said on Tuesday the evidence was based on evidence obtained, including "the presence of Islamic State flags in the vehicle that has been seized". There was also an improvised explosive device (IED) in the vehicle.

Twenty-five people still being treated in hospitals after Sunday's massacre, 10 of them in critical condition. Three of them are patients in a children's hospital.

Three Indian students were among the injured, but their names have not been disclosed yet.

Also among the injured is Ahmed al Ahmed, who was captured on video tackling and disarming one assailant, before pointing the man's weapon at him and then setting it on the ground. Albanese visited Ahemed and hailed him as a hero. *—PTI*

Violence likely before B'desh polls: US Embassy

WASHINGTON, 16 DEC

The United States Embassy in Dhaka has issued a nationwide security alert for American citizens following Bangladesh's announcement that its next parliamentary election and a national referendum will take place on 12 February 2026.

In an advisory released on Monday, the US Embassy stated that political rallies and demonstrations are expected to increase as the election date approaches. It cautioned that even peaceful gatherings could escalate into violence. The alert urged US citizens across Bangladesh to "remain vigilant, avoid demonstrations and large crowds, monitor local media for updates, and stay aware of their surroundings."

This warning follows the formal announcement by Bangladesh's Election Commission regarding the schedule for the national polls last week. The elections will involve voting for all 300 parliamentary seats occurring simultaneously with a national referendum.

This will mark the first national vote since the student-led uprising that resulted in the ousting of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024, with an interim administration led by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus currently in power. The election is anticipated to be politically significant as candidates file their nomination papers on 29 December 2025. *—ANI*

Trump sues BBC for $10 billion over editing of his 6 Jan speech

WASHINGTON, 16 DEC

US President Donald Trump has filed a lawsuit seeking USD 10 billion in damages from the BBC, accusing the British broadcaster of defamation as well as deceptive and unfair trade practices.

The 33-page lawsuit, filed on Monday, accuses the BBC of broadcasting a "false, defamatory, deceptive, disparaging, inflammatory, and malicious depiction of Trump," calling the 'Panorama' video "a brazen attempt to interfere in" the 2024 US presidential election.

It accused the BBC of "splicing together two entirely separate parts of President Trump's speech on 6 January, 2021" in order to "intentionally misrepresent the meaning of what Trump said".

The publicly funded broadcaster had apologised last month to Trump but rejected claims it had defamed him.

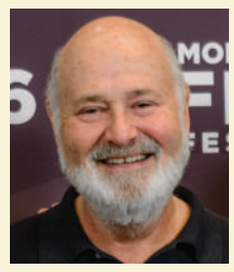
BBC chairman Samir Shah had called it an "error of judgment," which triggered the resignations of the BBC's top executive and its head of news.

The speech took place before some of Trump's supporters stormed the US Capitol as Congress was poised to certify President-elect Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 election that Trump falsely alleged was stolen from him.

The BBC had broadcast the hourlong documentary — titled 'Trump: A Second Chance?' — days before the 2024 US presidential election, splicing together quotes to make it appear as if Trump directly urged his supports to storm the Capitol. *—PTI*

I spoke to President Xi (Jinping) about (Hong Kong media mogul Jimmy Lai), and I asked to consider his release. He's an older man, and he's not well.

—Donald Trump, US President



Reiner died because he hated me: Don

Trump blamed Rob Reiner's outspoken opposition to the President for the actor-director's killing. The director and his wife, Michele Singer Reiner, were allegedly stabbed to death, with police apprehending their son Nick Reiner. Rob was killed because of "raging obsession" to Trump, the President wrote on Monday on Truth Social. Rob "caused anger" to others with his "incurable affliction" to me, Trump added. Notably, Michele took the cover photo of Trump's 1987 bestseller 'The Art of the Deal'.

Search continues for Brown University shooter

PROVIDENCE, 16 DEC

Authorities continue to search for the gunman responsible for a shooting at Brown University that resulted in two deaths and nine injuries. Investigators released three new videos showing the suspect, who wore a mask and a dark jacket, prior to the attack. The FBI has offered a USD 50,000 reward for information leading to the shooter's identification.

The FBI said the man is about 5 feet, 8 inches (173 centimetres) tall, with a stocky build.

Police had detained a person of interest but later released him, raising concerns about overall campus security.

"How someone got away, like in the middle of the day, is concerning," commented a prospective student Colin Moussette.

Attorney General Peter Neronha, who said Sunday that there weren't many cameras where the attack happened, said on Monday that investigators were "making steady progress."

The shooting occurred as students prepared for final exams, prompting a lockdown at the Ivy League school.

The lockdown was lifted on Monday. Some colleges and universities, including in Rhode Island and some Ivy League schools, were increasing security in light of the attack. Yale said extra security would be in place for Hanukkah celebrations.

Among the deceased are Ella Cook, 19, known for her involvement in church and campus activities, and MukhammadAzizUmurzokov, 18, who had overcome significant health challenges.

As the investigation continues, questions about the effectiveness of existing security measures are being raised by students and local residents. *—PTI*

Nepal lifts 10-year ban on high value Indian notes

KATHMANDU, 16 DEC

- Nepal lifted its decade-long ban on high-denomination Indian currency, allowing individuals to carry banknotes of Rs 200 and Rs 500 up to a maximum of INR 25,000 to boost tourism

Nepal has lifted its decade-long ban on high-denomination Indian currency, allowing individuals to carry banknotes of Rs 200 and Rs 500 up to a maximum of INR 25,000. The decision was made during a Cabinet meeting on Monday, with provisions now permitting both Nepali and Indian citizens to bring these notes into Nepal from India or vice versa.

This change follows amendments by the Reserve Bank of India to the Foreign Exchange Management (Export and Import of Currency) Regulations, enabling Indian, Nepali, and Bhutanese nationals to hold higher-denomination notes. Nepal Rastra Bank spokesperson Guru Prasad Poudel stated that the decision will be formalised once published in the Nepal gazette, facilitating travel and business. This aims to revitalise Nepal's tourism sector. *—PTI*

FENTANYL IS 'WEAPON OF MASS DESTRUCTION' IN US

WASHINGTON, 16 DEC

US President Donald Trump has signed an executive order, classifying fentanyl as a "weapon of mass destruction".

Trump said in the Oval Office on Monday his administration is "formally classifying fentanyl as a weapon of mass destruction, which is what it is. No bomb does what this is doing".

The term weapon of mass destruction has typically referred to nuclear, biological, chemical or kinetic threats capable of causing overwhelming and lasting damage to a population, infrastructure or environment. The US justified several invasions – notably Iraq – with weapons of mass destruction.

The order directs the homeland security secretary to "identify threat networks related to fentanyl smuggling" by using intelligence resources that in the past were devoted to the detection of other weapons of mass destruction.

Trump also said his administration is considering reclassifying marijuana as a less dangerous drug. "A lot of people want to see it," the President said. *—PTI*

Fentanyl users are often seen in a zombie-like trance position with contorted backs and people bending forward, touching their toes. Fentanyl is the leading cause of drug overdose deaths in the US

INDIA AT UNGA

'Pak respects people by jailing Imran, giving Munir immunity'

UNITED NATIONS, 16 DEC

India dismissed Pakistan's "divisive agenda" at the UN Security Council, saying Islamabad's "unique" way of respecting the will of its people was by jailing former prime minister Imran Khan and giving lifetime immunity to its Army Chief Asim Munir.

India's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Harish Parvathaneni, delivered a response in the Security Council on Monday after Pakistan's Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad raised the issues of Jammu and Kashmir and the Indus Waters Treaty during an open debate on 'Leadership for Peace'.

"Pakistan's unwarranted reference to Jammu and Kashmir in today's open debate attests to its obsessive focus on harming India and its people," Harish said.

India also rejected the Pakistani envoy's assertion that the issue of Jammu and Kashmir should be settled in accordance with the UN Charter, relevant Security Council resolutions and the will of the Kashmiri people.

Ex-Pakistan PM Imran Khan and Army Chief Asim Munir ***PHOTO: X***

"Pakistan, of course, has a unique way of respecting the will of its people -- by jailing a prime minister, by banning the ruling political party, and by letting its armed forces engineer a constitutional coup through the 27th amendment and giving life-time immunity to its Chief of Defence Forces," Harish said.

Khan has been imprisoned since August 2023 on corruption charges and has reportedly been held for extended periods in solitary confinement.

Meanwhile, the 27th Constitutional Amendment, passed last month under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, gives Pakistan's Chief of Defence Forces and Army Chief Field Marshal Munir lifelong immunity from any legal prosecution. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Musk becomes the first person worth $600B

CALIFORNIA, 16 DEC

Elon Musk's SpaceX has issued a tender offer that doubles the company's valuation to USD 800 billion, according to investors. This comes as SpaceX considers a potential public offering, which could value the company at about USD 1.5 trillion. The higher valuation lifts Musk's wealth, with his estimated 42 per cent stake increasing his net worth by about USD 168 billion to nearly USD 677 billion. This increased valuation follows courts denying the 12 per cent Tesla stock owner a record USD one trillion pay package. Musk's xAI holdings is also reportedly in talks to double funding at a USD 230 billion valuation. All of this brings Musk closer to becoming a trillionaire by 2026, according to Forbes. —*Agencies*

Gold snaps 4-day record rally, falls to Rs 1.35L/10g

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

Snapping the four-day record rally, gold prices declined by Rs 1,700 to Rs 1,35,900 per 10g in the national capital on Tuesday as investors booked profits amid weak global cues, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had surged by Rs 4,000 to touch an all-time high of Rs 1,37,600 per 10g on Monday. In the local bullion markets, silver prices also depreciated by Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,98,500 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes). In the international markets, spot gold snapped a five-day winning streak, declining by USD 27.80, or 0.65 per cent, to USD 4,277.42 per ounce. Spot silver also dropped by USD 1.07, or 1.67 per cent, to USD 63.02 per ounce in the overseas markets. —*PTI*

India seeks WTO consultations with EU over import

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

India has sought consultations with the European Union under the World Trade Organisation's Agreement on Safeguards over the EU's import quotas on certain Indian ferro-alloy products, in the iron and steel industry. India has requested that the consultations be held virtually between 16 and 19 December 2025, or on a mutually convenient date. The request follows safeguard measures proposed by the EU last month in the form of tariff-rate quotas, allowing duty-free imports up to a set volume and higher tariffs beyond it. These measures are generally imposed to protect domestic players. Before imposing these measures, a WTO member country would have to probe the matter and inform the Geneva-based multi-lateral body about the same. —*PTI*

'Tata Power to finalise ₹6,500 cr project by Jan'

BHUBANESWAR, 16 DEC

Tata Power plans to finalise its proposed 10 GW wafer and ingot manufacturing project, estimated to cost Rs 6,500 crore, by January next year. The plant, part of the company's backward integration strategy, was announced by Tata Power CEO and MD Praveer Sinha. The company is in discussions with several states, including Odisha, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, and expects to finalise the project location soon. "We are evaluating state policies and incentives before taking a final decision," Sinha said. Tata Power, a leading integrated power company, has a diversified portfolio of 15.9 GW across thermal, solar, and wind power. The proposed wafer and ingot project would make Tata Power a fully integrated player in solar manufacturing. —*PTI*

Rupee falls to fresh record low of 91.01 against USD

The unit fell by 23P, weighed down by foreign fund inflows

MUMBAI, 16 DEC

The rupee fell 23 paise against the greenback to settle at a new all-time low of 91.01 (provisional) on Tuesday, weighed down by relentless foreign fund outflows, no breakthrough in India-US trade deal, and persistent US dollar buying.

During the session, the local unit lost 36 paise from its previous close against the greenback to hit its lowest-ever level of 91.14, but regained some ground later in the day. Even a weaker greenback and a sharp decline in global crude oil prices could not prevent the slide in the local unit, forex traders said.

The rupee has fallen from 90 a dollar to 91 in the last 10 trading sessions. The unit has slipped 1 per cent against the greenback in the past five sessions alone.

According to forex traders, the rupee might even cross the 92 per dollar-mark this month.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 90.87 against the greenback and traded in the range of 90.76 to 91.14 before settling at 91.01 (provisional), down 23 paise from its previous close.

On Monday, the local unit settled at 90.78 against the US dollar, registering a loss of 29 paise from its previous close.

"Rupee made a new lifetime low as dollar buying continued with news that (US President) Donald Trump has not agreed to the new trade proposals from India. So the deal goes into limbo till a new one is finalised," Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury and Executive Director, Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP, said.

Wholesale Price Index (WPI)-based inflation was at (-) 1.21 per cent in October and 2.16 per cent in November last year.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.08 per cent lower at 98.23. —*PTI*

GETS RBI'S NOD

HDFC Bank to buy up to 9.5% stake in IndusInd Bank

MUMBAI, 16 DEC

HDFC Bank has obtained approval from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to allow its group entities to collectively increase their holding in IndusInd Bank to 9.50 per cent. The announcement was made in a filing to the stock exchange on 16 December, 2025.

The RBI's permission enables HDFC Bank, the promoter and sponsor of various group entities, to acquire an aggregate holding of up to 9.50 per cent of the paid-up share capital or voting rights in IndusInd Bank. The group entities include HDFC Mutual Fund, HDFC Life Insurance Company Limited, HDFC ERGO General Insurance Company Limited, HDFC Pension Fund Management Limited, and HDFC Securities Limited. HDFC Bank stated, "We wish to inform you that the RBI vide its letter dated 15 December, 2025, has given its approval to the Bank to acquire an aggregate holding of up to 9.50 per cent of the paid-up share capital or voting rights in IndusInd." This approval is valid for one year, expiring on 14 December, 2026.

HDFC Bank must ensure that the total combined holding of its group entities does not exceed the 9.50 per cent limit during this period. The bank clarified that the approval is in accordance with the RBI's "Commercial Banks - Acquisition and Holding of Shares or Voting Rights" Directions of 2025.

Consequently, HDFC Bank submitted an application to the RBI on 24 October, 2025, to comply with regulatory rules, anticipating that their group entities would surpass the previously imposed limit of 5 per cent. HDFC Bank shares are currently trading at Rs 995 on the National Stock Exchange. —*ANI*

NCLT APPROVES VEDANTA DEMERGER PLAN

MUMBAI, 16 DEC

The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) on Tuesday approved the Vedanta demerger plan, paving the way for splitting the group into sector-specific entities across aluminium, oil and gas, power, and iron and steel.

"The sanction to the company scheme is granted," the Mumbai bench of the tribunal, composed of Charanjeet Singh Gulati and Nilesh Sharma, said.

NCLT had reserved the order after hearing the matter in November.

Vedanta welcomed the NCLT order pronounced on Tuesday, sanctioning the company's demerger scheme.

"The approval marks a key milestone in Vedanta's transformation into focused, sector-leading companies with clear strategic mandates and dedicated capital structures. The company will now proceed with the necessary steps to implement the scheme," a Vedanta spokesperson said.

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPnG) had opposed the demerger, citing concerns over the potential financial risks and alleged misrepresentation of hydrocarbon assets and insufficient disclosure of liabilities.

The ministry also wanted disclosures on the concealment of facts that include showing the exploration blocks as Vedanta's assets and details of the loan taken on the basis of those assets, among others.

The ministry cited a long-pending dispute concerning Vedanta's RJ oil and gas block in Rajasthan, noting that a substantial portion of the company's debt was related to the government claims linked to the block.

According to the ministry, Vedanta has not adequately disclosed these liabilities in its demerger scheme. —*PTI*

Markets tumble dragged by weak global trends

MUMBAI, 16 DEC

Benchmark Sensex tumbled 533.50 points and the broader Nifty declined to the 25,860 level on Tuesday as persistent foreign fund outflows, a weak rupee and sluggish global market trends dented investor sentiment.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tanked 533.50 points or 0.63 per cent to settle at 84,679.86. During the day, it dived 592.75 points or 0.69 per cent to 84,620.61.

The 50-share NSE Nifty dropped 167.20 points or 0.64 per cent to a week's low of 25,860.10.

Among Sensex firms, Axis Bank tanked the most by 5.03 per cent. Eternal, HCL Tech, Bajaj Finserv, Tata Steel, UltraTech Cement and Bajaj Finance were also among the laggards.

However, Titan, Bharti Airtel, Mahindra & Mahindra and Asian Paints were among the gainers.

The rupee breached the record low level of 91 against the US dollar and hit 91.14 in intra-day trade due to foreign fund outflows on Tuesday.

The BSE midcap gauge dropped 0.78 per cent, and the smallcap index dipped 0.69 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, realty tanked 1.36 per cent, followed by bankex (1.03 per cent), commodities (0.91 per cent), IT (0.90 per cent), BSE Focused IT (0.86 per cent), financial services (0.83 per cent) and metal (0.82 per cent).

Telecommunication and consumer durables were the only gainers.

A total of 2,519 stocks declined while 1,651 advanced and 158 remained unchanged on the BSE. —*PTI*

PM'S 2-DAY VISIT

PM aims to double India-Jordan trade to $5B in next 5 years

AMMAN, 16 DEC

Crown Prince of Jordan drives Prime Minister Narendra Modi to a Museum in Amman, Jordan, on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi has proposed a doubling of bilateral trade between India and Jordan to USD 5 billion over the next five years, inviting Jordanian companies to harness the opportunities presented by India's robust economic growth.

During his two-day visit to Amman, at the India-Jordan Business Forum attended by King Abdullah II, Crown Prince Hussein, and industry leaders, Modi emphasised the potential for joint ventures between the two nations.

He noted, "The relationship between India and Jordan is one where historical trust and future economic opportunities come together."

The Prime Minister highlighted the India's impressive growth trajectory, stating, "India is on course to become the third-largest economy in the world... [and] offers immense business opportunities." He encouraged Jordanian firms to leverage India's 1.4 billion consumer market and strong manufacturing capabilities.

Modi specifically cited potential collaborations in sectors such as digital public infrastructure, IT, fintech, healthtech, agri-tech, and renewable energy.

He added, "India has a lot of experience in farming in dry climates... We can work on solutions like precision farming and micro-irrigation."

With India being Jordan's third-largest trading partner, Modi underscored the significance of "building long-term, trusted partnerships that extend beyond statistics," pointing to mutual benefits in pharmaceuticals, agriculture, and infrastructure. —*PTI*

Sebi to discuss overhaul of MF rules

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

The SEBI board is set to convene on Wednesday to deliberate on a report from a high-level panel that recommends the public disclosure of assets of senior officers to mitigate conflicts of interest. The agenda also includes a comprehensive review of mutual fund and stock broker regulations, alongside relaxed KYC requirements for NRIs and the introduction of a closing-auction session.

This marks the fourth board meeting chaired by Sebi chief Tuhin Kanta Pandey since he assumed office on 1 March. The panel's report, submitted on November 10, advocates for reforms promoting transparency and a "zero-tolerance" approach to potential conflicts of interest among top officials. Key recommendations include establishing an anonymous whistleblower system, banning expensive gifts, enforcing a two-year restriction on post-retirement roles, and creating a Chief Ethics and Compliance Officer (CECO) position.

In terms of mutual fund regulations, Sebi has circulated consultation papers proposing clearer definitions for the Total Expense Ratio (TER) and revised brokerage charge limits. Notably, Sebi plans to eliminate the additional 5 basis points previously allowed for asset management companies. For stock brokers, the 1992 regulations are set to be reviewed, introducing definitions for 'algorithmic trading' to enhance compliance clarity. —*PTI*

- This marks the fourth board meeting chaired by Sebi chief Tuhin Kanta Pandey since he assumed office on 1 March

IndiGo mass flight chaos dent ATF sales by 4.1%

DELHI, 16 DEC

IndiGo's widespread flight cancellations in early this month resulted in aviation turbine fuel (ATF) sales falling by over 4 per cent in the first fortnight of December, according to preliminary industry data on Tuesday.

Jet fuel or ATF demand had been consistently rising for the past two years as India's aviation sector rebounded from the lows of the Covid pandemic-induced disruptions. But this trend changed when IndiGo saw mass flight cancellations in December as India's largest airline struggled with new pilot duty-time rules, crew shortages, and winter weather disruptions like dense fog at major airports.

IndiGo cancelled almost 5,000 flights - over 1,600 out of about 2,300 daily flights at the peak. Operations stabilised over the weekend.

ATF sales during 1 to 15 December dropped to 3,31,400 tonnes from 3,45,400 tonnes in the same period a year back, the data showed.

Month-on-month, the sales were down 7.2 per cent.

Jet was an outlier in the fuel basket, with other major fuels such as petrol, diesel, and LPG posting robust growth.

India's diesel consumption - the most consumed fuel in the country, accounting for almost 40 per cent of the fuel consumption basket - rose by nearly 5 per cent to 3.3 million tonnes during 1-15 December. —*PTI*

COLLAB INCLUDES GEMINI & GEMMA

Google pledges $8M for AI push in Indian sectors

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

Google on Tuesday announced funding support of USD 8 million to India's AI Centres of Excellence for health, agriculture, education, and sustainable cities, and committed USD 4,00,000 to support the development of India's health foundation model.

Google — the architect of AI models, including Gemini and Gemma that are integrated for search enhancements, cloud services, and enterprise tools — is also supporting Gnani.AI, CoRover.AI, and BharatGen with USD 50,000 grants each for building models serving Indic language solutions.

Google said it is providing Wadhwani AI with USD 4.5 million in funding to support multilingual AI-powered applications for health and agriculture, according to a release.

The announcements mark a slew of new collaborations and funding commitments by Google to bolster India's AI ecosystem, the company said.

"Google announced funding of USD 4,00,000 to support new collaborations that will leverage 'MedGemma' to build India's Health Foundation Models," the company said in a release.

Google said Ajna Lens will work with experts from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences to build models that will support India-specific use cases in Dermatology and OPD Triaging

Additionally, India's linguistic and socio-cultural diversity is a strength in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said on Tuesday, adding that solutions built here in healthcare, education and agriculture can also benefit other regions such as Africa and Latin America. —*PTI*

India's PMI drops to 58.9 in November, says HSBC

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

The pace of business growth in India slowed slightly in December, but overall activity in the private sector remained robust, according to the latest HSBC PMI data released today.

The HSBC Composite PMI fell to 58.9 in December from 59.7 in November, indicating that while growth has softened, it continues to exceed the 50.0 mark, signalling ongoing expansion.

The December reading revealed the slowest growth in business output since February, with both manufacturing and service sectors experiencing decreased activity due to a softer rise in new orders.

Nevertheless, new orders remained strong, buoyed by improving customer demand.

Additionally, staffing levels remained mostly unchanged, suggesting a cautious approach from businesses amid muted inflation pressures.

The manufacturing sector also showed slower growth, with the HSBC Flash India Manufacturing PMI declining to 55.7 in December from 56.6 in November. —*ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

India to host first-ever UCI 2.2 cycling event

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

A historic moment awaits India's cycling landscape as the country is set to host the first-ever UCI 2.2 Bajaj Pune Grand Tour 2026, a continental men's team elite road race from 19 to 23 January in the Pune district. The tour will kick-start the international cycling calendar with a four-stage, multi-day challenge. The Bajaj Pune Grand Tour is a four-day, four-stage 437-km continental team men's road race, expected to witness over 150 professional international cyclists from 26 countries in action. The race is being organised by the Government of Maharashtra and Pune District Administration, along with the Cycling Federation of India. "From the 1960s to the 1990s cycle was a mode of transportation for India.—*PTI*

Viswanathan Anand beats Gukesh in Global Chess League

MUMBAI, 16 DEC

Indian chess legend Viswanathan Anand beat reigning world champion D Gukesh in a Global Chess League match in Mumbai on Tuesday. Ganges Grandmasters' Anand, a five-time world champion, bettered Alaskan Knights' Gukesh with white pieces to claim his first win of the tournament. The 56-year-old Anand nudged ahead of his younger compatriot in a game which progressed from a Sicilian Defence opening. Anand pounced on a mid-game mistake from Gukesh (34. Rc8) to tilt the game in his favour. He then piled the pressure on the A and B ranks to push further ahead in the game.—*PTI*

X/@ESPORTS

Thai eSports player expelled from SEA Games for cheating

BANGKOK, 16 DEC

A Thai eSports player competing in an Arena of Valor women's match has been expelled from the Southeast Asian Games in Bangkok for cheating, the host's eSports federation said Tuesday, leading to her whole team pulling out. Thai gamer Warasin Naphat "committed an offence... by using unauthorised third-party software or hardware modification during Game 1" of a match on Monday, according to a letter from a SEA Games delegate released by the Thailand Esports Federation (TESF). Warasin was also filmed raising her middle finger during a televised broadcast of the event in Bangkok, local media reported.—*PTI*

Jobe banned for 2 Dortmund games after red card

DORTMUND, 16 DEC

Jobe Bellingham has been banned for Borussia Dortmund's next two Bundesliga games after he was sent off against Freiburg. The English midfielder, younger brother of Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham, was dismissed in the 53rd minute of Dortmund's game on Sunday for a foul on Philipp Treu. Dortmund goalkeeper Gregor Kobel had given the ball away, and Treu would otherwise have been through on goal. Bellingham's team was leading 1-0 at the time, and the game ended in a 1-1 draw. His suspension means the 20-year-old Bellingham will miss a Bundesliga game for the first time since he signed from Sunderland in June.—*PTI*

KKR splurges on Green & Pathirana with record bids

ABU DHABI, 16 DEC

Kolkata Knight Riders splurged a record-breaking Rs 25.20 crore to land top Australian all-rounder Cameron Green and Rs 18 crore to acquire the services of Sri Lankan pacer Matheesha Pathirana in the Indian Premier League players' auction here on Tuesday.

Uncapped Indian players were also a big hit with Uttar Pradesh's 20-year-old left-arm spinner Prashant Veer and Rajasthan's 19-year-old keeper-batter Kartik Sharma going to Chennai Super Kings for Rs 14.20 crore each.

Both became the highest-paid uncapped players in the history of IPL auction after coming in at a base price of Rs 30 lakh each.

Jammu and Kashmir pacer Auqib Nabi Dar also attracted a hefty sum of Rs 8.40 crore from the Delhi Capitals to be among the top gainers in the mini auction. Dar's base price was also Rs 30 lakh.

Indian stars Prithvi Shaw and Sarfaraz Khan, however, went unsold in the auction despite their good run of form with the bat.

Green surpassed compatriot Mitchell Starc (Rs 24.75 crore) to become the most expensive overseas player at an IPL auction. This was after Kolkata Knight Riders and Chennai Super Kings were involved in an intense bidding war for him before the latter emerged as the winner.

KKR also went after Venkatesh Iyer before pulling out of the race against Royal Challengers Bengaluru, who got the India all-rounder for Rs 7 crore. The three-time champions then entered the fray to buy Pathirana after Delhi Capitals and Lucknow Super Giants withdrew following an intense bidding war between the two franchises. Entering the auction at a base price of Rs 2 crore, Pathirana became the most expensive Sri Lankan sold in an IPL auction. KKR's managing director Venky Mysore said the franchise was happy at the price at which it got Green, who is expected to "add a lot" to the team in the upcoming season A total of 359 players 246 Indians and 113 overseas players are part of the mini auction pool with the 10 franchises bidding to fill up a maximum of 77 slots, including 31 reserved for foreign players. —*PTI*

Cameron Green PHOTO: PTI

Matheesha Pathirana PHOTO: PTI

TOP AUCTIONED PLAYERS

LIAM LIVINGSTONE Sold to SRH for Rs 13 crore.

MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN Sold to KKR for Rs 9.2 crore

JOSH INGLIS Sold to LSG for Rs 8.6 crore

JASON HOLDER Sold to GT for Rs 7 crore

PATHUM NISSANKA Sold to DC for Rs 4 crore

BEN DWARSHUIS Sold to PBKS for Rs 4.4 crore.

MANGESH YADAV Sold to RCB for Rs 5.2 crore

RAHUL CHAHAR Sold to CSK for Rs 5.2 crore.

LUNGI NGIDI Sold to DC for Rs 2 crore

MATT HENRY Sold to SRK for Rs 2 crore.

RACHIN RAVINDRA Sold to KKR for Rs 2 crore

RAGHUWANSHI Sold to LSG for Rs 2.2 crore

TIM SEIFERT Sold to KKR for Rs 1.5 crore

SALIL ARORA Sold to SRH for Rs 1.5 crore

AKASH DEEP Sold to KKR for Rs 1 crore

SARFARAZ KHAN Sold To CSK For Rs 75 lakh

Pressure building on SKY as India eye series win

Indian captain has been searching for fluency for over a year

LUCKNOW, 16 DEC

Shubman Gill's lean patch has been the talking point, but an equally "out of runs" skipper Suryakumar Yadav is also under intense scrutiny as India look to find the right balance and seal the five-match series against South Africa in the fourth T20I here on Wednesday. India currently leads the five-match series 2-1.The third game was an ideal opportunity for Suryakumar to rediscover his touch while India chased a modest 118-run target, but the ease that once made him the top-ranked batter in the world was noticeably missing. Shots that defined his dominance have been producing erratic results, and the match in Dharamsala was no different,t as he fell to his trademark pick-up stroke, highlighting a continued struggle. But he was defiant when it came to self-assessment. "The thing is, I've been batting beautifully in the nets. I'm trying everything that's in my control. When the runs have to come, they'll definitely come. I'm not out of form, but definitely out of runs," Suryakumar confidently said at the post-match presentation ceremony after India's win in Dharamsala on Sunday.However, the numbers tell a worrying story. The **Indian captain has been searching for fluency for over a year**, averaging under 15 in the format this season.

Additionally, he's still without a half-century in 2025, the longest such phase of his career. Only twice during this period has he managed to bat beyond 20 balls. With the T20 World Cup less than two months away, the defending champions would want their leader and premier batter to rediscover his rhythm sooner rather than later.

Vice-captain Shubman Gill's struggles are as bad, if not worse.

Sticking to basics helped SA become competitive again: Nortje

Sticking to the basics and drawing from a larger talent pool, fighting for limited spots in the team has led to South Africa's resurgence across formats in the past couple of years, according to pacer Anrich Nortje. Buoyed by historic achievements, including their World Test Championship title and a maiden appearance in the T20 World Cup final last year, the Proteas have re-established themselves as one of world cricket's leading forces. —*PTI*

INDIA VS SOUTH AFRICA T20I

INDIA vs SOUTH AFRICA
4TH T20I
Match starts at
7 pm IST

HEAD TO HEAD AT LUCKNOW

PLAYED:	36
INDIA WON:	19
SA WON:	13
NO RESULT	4

REPLACING DUTCH GP

Stefano Domenicali (Right), President and CEO of Formula 1 PHOTO: X/@FORMULA 1

Portugal to host F1 in 2027 and 2028

PARIS, 16 DEC

Formula One will return to Portugal after six years, as part of the 2027 and 2028 calendar, F1 announced on Tuesday.

The Autódromo Internacional do Algarve, more commonly known as Portimão, last hosted F1 events in 2020 and 2021, and was a key venue in the sport's return to racing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The races are part of a two-year agreement with the Portuguese government, Turismo de Portugal, and promoter Parkalgar, Parques Tecnologicos e Desportivos, S.A.

"I'm delighted to see Portimão return to the Formula 1 calendar and for the sport to continue to ignite the passion of our incredible Portuguese fanbase. The circuit delivers on-track excitement from the first corner to the chequered flag, and its energy lifts fans out of their seats," Stefano Domenicali, President and CEO of Formula 1, said.

Set in the idyllic Algarve in Portugal's southernmost region, known for its spectacular beaches and historic charm, the 4.6-kilometre circuit offers drivers a technical challenge with dramatic elevation changes, culminating in a plunge down to the final right-hander leading back to the pit straight.

Portugal's first F1 race was in Porto in 1958, but it was discontinued shortly after. Estoril hosted grands prix from 1984-96, and it was here that Ayrton Senna claimed his first victory.

Lewis Hamilton won both pandemic races in Portimao and surpassed Michael Schumacher's record of all-time wins with his 92nd victory in 2021. —*PTI*

Kundu's blistering 209 leads India to a win over Malaysia

DUBAI, 16 DEC

Abhigyan Kundu's record 209 not out and an excellent return of 5/22 from Deepesh Devendran set up a massive 315-run victory for India against Malaysia in their U-19 Asia Cup match here on Tuesday.

India's margin of win is now its second biggest in terms of runs in Youth ODIs, after a 326-run triumph over Uganda in 2022.

Kundu etched his name in record books with a first-ever double century for any Indian in Youth ODIs, scoring his runs off 125 balls with 17 fours and nine sixes to fire India to a mammoth 408 for seven.

In reply, right-arm medium pacer Devendran ran through the Malaysian middle-order after Kishan Singh and Udhav Mohan struck once each to rock the opposition, and despite a late resistance from Hamzah Panggi (35), Malaysia was bowled out for 93 in 32.1 overs. It was a perfect outing for the Indian colts, who put together a robust batting show, in which the tone was set by Vaibhav Suryavanshi, who notched up a quickfire 50 off 26 balls (5 fours and 3 sixes). While Suryavanshi could not convert his start into another big score, having scored 171 a few days ago against the UAE, India was unperturbed even as they lost Vihaan Malhotra (7) and Ayush Mhatre (14) cheaply. —*PTI*

Mohali Kabaddi player's shooters identified

CHANDIGARH, 16 DEC

The Mohali Police on Tuesday said three suspects, including two shooters, who allegedly killed a 30-year-old kabaddi player-cum- promoter in the middle of a tournament here a day ago, have been identified and they are associated with a gang which orchestrated the killing.

Police feel that the gang wanted to exert its dominance over Kabaddi tournaments and considered the player close to jailed gangster Jaggu Bhagwanpuria. Kanwar Digvijay Singh, alias Rana Balachauria, was shot at by the gunmen after he arrived with his team to take part in a tournament in Mohali on Monday. He was critically injured in the attack and was rushed to the Fortis Hospital in Mohali, where he was declared dead. The incident took place at Sohana in Mohali, where a private kabaddi tournament had been going on for the past few days, SSP Harmandeep Singh Hans said, adding the assailants fled on a motorcycle after firing from a .30 bore weapon.

"Doni Bal and Lucky Patial's allied gang is behind the murder, and the crime was executed by the accused at their behest," the police officer told reporters in Mohali on Tuesday. —*PTI*

3RD ASHES TEST

Cummins and Lyon back, but no place for Khawaja in Australia's team

ADELAIDE, 16 DEC

Veteran Usman Khawaja has missed selection to Australia's team for the third Ashes test starting on Wednesday against England, with Travis Head kept at the top of the batting lineup with Jake Weatherald.

Australia leads the five-test series 2-0 and can retain the Ashes with a win or draw in Adelaide. England named its team on Monday.

Captain Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon will return to the bowling attack at the expense of Brendan Doggett and Michael Neser, while the top seven is unchanged.

Steve Smith was the first in the nets to bat on Tuesday after missing Monday's session due to an unspecified ill-ness. Smith captained Australia in the first two test victories due to Cummins' injury absence.

Cummins, playing his first test since mid-July in the West Indies, predicted Australia will be even better in the Adelaide test as it tries to wrap up the Ashes.

"It feels like everything has come together and we're not just hanging on until the end of the series, which sometimes you are," Cummins said Tuesday.

"We're actually peaking and hopefully have heaps of resources available." —*PTI*

BWF WORLD TOUR FINALS

Satwik-Chirag brace for stern test

HANGZHOU, 16 DEC

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty will face a stern examination of form and resilience when the season-ending BWF World Tour Finals begin here on Wednesday, with the Indian men's doubles duo drawn in what is widely regarded as the 'group of death'.

The showpiece features the top-eight players or pairs in each discipline, determined by performances across the World Tour calendar.

Former world No. 1 Satwik and Chirag, currently ranked world No. 3, are the only Indian representatives at this elite event.

Placed in Group B, the Asian Games champions will take on a formidable line-up that includes multiple Olympic medallists.

They open their campaign against China's Liang Wei Keng and Wang Chang, the Paris Olympic silver medallists, before facing Indonesia's Fajar Alfian and Muhammad Shohibul Fikri, a pair known for their pace and attacking depth.

In their final group match on Friday, the Indians will meet their long-time nemesis, Malaysia's Aaron Chia and Soh Wooi Yik, who are the Paris Olympic bronze medallists and second seeds.

The head-to-head numbers underline the challenge. Satwik and Chirag trail the world No. 7 Chinese pair 3-7, having lost to them in the Hong Kong Open final in September, though the Indians prevailed in their most recent meeting at the China Masters. —*PTI*

Faizan Anwar wins WBA Intercontinental Championship

DUBAI, 16 DEC

Indian boxer Faizan Anwar won the WBA (World Boxing Association) Intercontinental Championship, defeating Russia's Khuseyn Baysangurov by split decision in a well-fought 10-round professional bout here on Tuesday.

The 24-year-old from Kolkata produced a controlled and disciplined performance against Baysangurov, who entered the contest with a record of 25 wins and one loss and had remained unbeaten since 2018. —*PTI*